

IN  
EXCHANGE  
FOR A  
SOUL

MARY LINSKILL





Class PZ.3

Book L6555I  
2

Copyright N<sup>o</sup> \_\_\_\_\_

COPYRIGHT DEPOSIT.



















IN EXCHANGE FOR A SOUL



# Lovell's International Series

OF

## MODERN NOVELS.

---

- No. 1. MISS EYON OF EYON COURT. By Katharine S. Macquoid. 30 Cents.  
No. 2. HARTAS MATURIN. By H. F. Lester. 50 Cents.  
No. 3. TALES OF TO-DAY. By George R. Sims, author of "Mary Jane's Memoirs." 30 Cents.  
No. 4. ENGLISH LIFE SEEN THROUGH YANKEE EYES. By T. C. Crawford. 50 Cents.  
No. 5. PENNY LANCASTER, FARMER. By Mrs. Bellamy, author of "Old Man Gilbert." 50 Cents.  
No. 6. UNDER FALSE PRETENCES. By Adeline Sergeant. 50 Cents.  
No. 7. IN EXCHANGE FOR A SOUL. By Mary Linskill. 30 Cents.  
No. 8. GUILDEROY. By Ouida. 30 Cents.  
No. 9. ST. CUTHBERT'S TOWER. By Florence Warden. 30 Cents.  
No. 10. ELIZABETH MORLEY. By Katharine S. Macquoid. 30 Cents.  
No. 11. DIVORCE; OR FAITHFUL AND UNFAITHFUL. By Margaret Lee 50 Cents.  
No. 12. LONG ODDS. By Hawley Smart. 30 Cents.

Other books by well-known authors are in course of preparation, and will be published at regular intervals.

\*\*\* *The above published in cloth; price per volume, \$1.00.*

FRANK F. LOVELL & COMPANY,  
142 AND 144 WORTH STREET, NEW YORK.

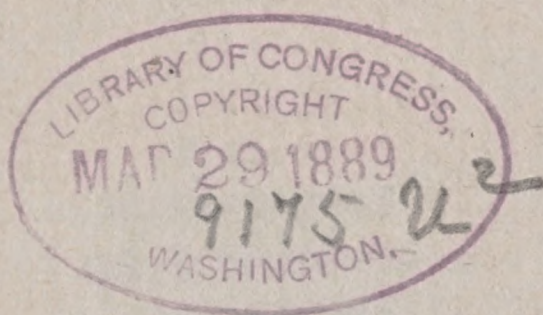


# IN EXCHANGE FOR A SOUL

BY

MARY LINSKILL

AUTHOR OF "A LOST SON," ETC., ETC.



NEW YORK

FRANK F. LOVELL & COMPANY

142 AND 144 WORTH STREET

Copy 2



P23  
L6555I  
2.

Sept 24

COPYRIGHT, 1889,  
BY  
JOHN W. LOVELL.

2d. COPY  
SUPPLIED FROM  
COPYRIGHT FILES  
JANUARY, 1911.

10919  
10920  
10921  
10922  
10923  
10924  
10925  
10926  
10927  
10928  
10929  
10930  
10931  
10932  
10933  
10934  
10935  
10936  
10937  
10938  
10939  
10940  
10941  
10942  
10943  
10944  
10945  
10946  
10947  
10948  
10949  
10950  
10951  
10952  
10953  
10954  
10955  
10956  
10957  
10958  
10959  
10960  
10961  
10962  
10963  
10964  
10965  
10966  
10967  
10968  
10969  
10970  
10971  
10972  
10973  
10974  
10975  
10976  
10977  
10978  
10979  
10980  
10981  
10982  
10983  
10984  
10985  
10986  
10987  
10988  
10989  
10990  
10991  
10992  
10993  
10994  
10995  
10996  
10997  
10998  
10999  
11000



N.T. 27.7.11

# IN EXCHANGE FOR A SOUL.

## CHAPTER I.

THORHILDA THEYN.

'O what a thing is man! how far from power  
From settled peace and rest!  
He is some twenty several men at least  
Each several hour!'

GEORGE HERBERT.

'HAPPY! What *right* hast thou to be happy?'

This pregnant question, asked once emphatically by Carlyle, and repeated often by him in modified form, is certainly worthy of attention. Consciously or unconsciously, the need for happiness is a factor in the life of each one of us: and no attempt to deny the need is so successful as we dream.

Thorhilda Theyn was not greatly given to self-questioning. So far, perhaps, there had seemed to be no special necessity for it in her life—that is, no necessity caused by pressure of outward circumstance, by any of the strong crises that come upon most human lives at one time or another. She was yet young; she was very beautiful. Life was all before her, and the promise of it exceeding fair. What need for question so far?

Yet as she stood there on that blue, breezy May morning, she felt herself decidedly in the grasp of some new spirit of inquiry, born within her apparently of the day and of the hour, strong at its birth, and demanding attention.

The waters of the North Sea were her grand outlook. They were spread all before her across the bay, rippling from point to point, leaping, darting, dancing. The free, fresh, rustling sound was sweeter to her always than the similar sound of the wind in the woodland trees; and it was soothing as soft music to watch the wavelets at play, leaping into light, flashing for a gay, glad moment, then dissolving instantly into apparent nothingness. Over and over it was all repeated, and the entrancingly uncertain cer-



tainty was as a spell to hold her there by the foot of the tall cliffs of Ulvstan Bight as one held in a dream.

'They say that life is like that—the poets, the philosophers,' Thorhilda said to herself, leaning lightly upon the parapet, tall and straight, and still, and beautiful. She was dressed as became her stately style, in a fashion that might have been of that day or of this, so few of its details were borrowed from any extraneous source. Her gown fell gracefully about her feet; her long cloak almost covered it; her small hands were crossed lightly, and held her hat, so that the fair face, so sweet and yet so strong, was all unshaded from the morning sun. And it was a face that could well bear the full, clear light; no thought-line was yet graven upon the wide forehead, on either side of which the dark abundant hair was braided 'Madonna-wise'; deep, changeful gray eyes looked out from below the white drooping lids that give to any face a touch of pathos—a touch contradicted at that moment on Thorhilda's face by an evidently half-unconscious smile, which played fitfully about her mouth. It was a mouth that was almost childlike in the fine roundness of its curves, and yet it was the lower part of the face that displayed firmness, decision. The eyes were all gentleness, all tenderness, in repose. When the lips smiled in conversation the eyes smiled too; and a fascinating piquancy of expression would suddenly light up features that had seemed too grave and gentle ever to be piquant. The effect was apt to be surprising; but it was always a pleasant surprise, and betrayed the observer to admiration, though no such effect had been expected on the one side, or certainly intended on the other. Thorhilda was innocent of the art of producing effects. That such an art existed was a matter of hearsay, and therefore dubious.

'They say that life is like that!' she had murmured half audibly, 'like

' "A momentary ray,  
Smiling in a winter's day.  
'Tis a current's rapid stream,  
'Tis a shadow, 'tis a dream.' "

So wrote Francis Quarles, over two hundred years ago; so others have written,' she went on. 'And yet how different one feels! I feel this morning as if life were ages long. I have lived but four-and-twenty years, yet I seem to have centuries in my personal memory.'

Presently definite thought passed on into indefinite. Dreams came up out of the past, with reminiscence sad and sunny; and finally came that bright yet questioning mood of which mention has been made already, the disposition to ask herself, not 'What right have I to be happy?' but '*Why* am I so happy?'

Once as she leaned by the edge of the sea-wall, watching the gulls float up and down with folded wing and yielding breast upon the gently heaving waters, an answer came suddenly. Was it from



the heart, or from the brain only? Though she was alone, she blushed, the long eyelashes drooped; and a little instant, negative movement of the head might have been detected had anyone to detect it been there.

‘No, *no!* It is not that, it is not *that!*’ she made haste to assure herself. ‘I do not feel that *he* could make happiness of mine. No, it is not that!’

It was perhaps significant that she did not long continue to dwell upon the idea of Percival Meredith. He was a neighbour, the owner of Ormston Magna, a place some three miles nearer to the sea than Yarburgh; indeed, from its terraced gardens you could look out over the wide expanse of the German Ocean. Percival, who was an elderly-looking man if you considered his thirty-four summers, lived at Ormston with his mother, a lady who might easily have been mistaken for his elder sister. It had been made evident for some time to Canon and Mrs. Godfrey that the Merediths had especial motives for gladly accepting every invitation that was sent to them from the Rectory, and for inviting the inhabitants of the Rectory to Ormston on any and every possible occasion. Of late Thorhilda had herself discovered the reason of all this; and she was perplexed, pleased, perturbed by turns. Only at rare moments was she conscious of any true satisfaction in thinking of Percival Meredith and his too evident intentions.

Yes; it was certainly significant that at the present moment she made haste to put away all thought of him, and went on thinking, meditating, on the strong, glad sense of her life and its happiness. She was not old enough, or tried enough, to know how on such days the mere sense of living is enough for unusual exultation.

‘Bliss was it on that morn to be alive,  
But to be young was very heaven.’

So wrote Wordsworth; but he had passed his youth when he wrote this.

Had anyone in Thorhilda’s circle of friends—Gertrude Douglas, for instance, who was considered to be her most intimate friend, been asked to give a reason for Miss Theyn’s happiness, Gertrude would have made answer, ‘How should she not be happy?’

Her home in the house of her uncle, Canon Godfrey, the Rector of Market Yarburgh, was, admittedly, as happy a home as a woman could have. The Canon’s wife, Milicent Godfrey, was the sister of Thorhilda’s dead mother; and, being a childless woman herself, with a passionate love for children, she had done all that might be done to make Thorhilda’s life a life full of all sweetness, all light, all good. It was for her niece’s sake that the old Rectory had been refurnished, made beautiful with all artistic beauty that fair means could command. Indeed, nothing had been left undone that love could suggest as better to be done. And Thorhilda, having a keen appreciation of the material good of life—*too* keen, said some of



the friendliest of her friends—was neither unconscious nor ungrateful. Therefore what reason for not being happy?

Is it true, that old saying, 'Every light has its shadow'?

Scientifically, it must be true, always; but surely the analogy will not bear stretching to meet and to fit this human life in every possible phase. We know that it will not, and are happier for the knowledge—happier and better.

But the bright picture of Thorhilda Theyn's life was not without that enhancing touch of depth in the background of it, which gives both to colour and light their rightful prominence and effect. There had been hours, nay days, when that dark background had claimed more of the girl's life than any foreground object that could be put before her for her distraction.

'I must think of these things, Aunt Milicent,' she had said. 'Garlaff Grange is my own home. They are my own people who live there.'

'No; there I *cannot* agree,' Mrs. Godfrey had replied. 'Your mother gave you to me solemnly, prayerfully, when she was dying. She entreated me to promise that the Rectory should be your home. . . . I have tried to keep my promise.'

The touch of emotion with which these and other sayings were uttered was usually conclusive. Thorhilda had no heart to go on with arguments presented to her only by an inadequate sense of duty. If people so much older and wiser than herself as Canon Godfrey and her aunt considered that it was her wisdom to sit still, why should she not agree—especially since movement in the direction indicated by conscience was so eminently distasteful?

And yet from time to time conscience would have its way. Did she really do all that it was her duty to do in going to the Grange now and then when it was quite convenient to her aunt to drive round that way; in sending presents on birthdays and Christmas Days; in calling occasionally to see how her sister Rhoda was, or to inquire after her Aunt Averil? It was not pleasant for her to go there—the reverse of that—and she did not for a moment imagine that she gave any pleasure by going. She was saved from all illusion on that head. So far as she could remember, her father had never once in his life said, 'I am glad to see you!' never, even when she was a child, offered her any greeting or parting kiss. Once or twice he had shaken hands; once or twice he had—not at all ironically—taken off his hat as the Rectory carriage drove away with only Thorhilda in it; and there had seemed nothing incongruous in his doing so.

His daughter knew little of him except what she heard from others; and it was long since she had heard any pleasant thing. For years past everything had been going down at Garlaff Grange; and though repeated efforts had been made by Canon Godfrey and others to stop the descent, no such efforts had availed, and it was long now since Squire Theyn had permitted anything of what he termed 'interference.'



‘Ah’ll ha’ neä mair on’t!’ he had said to his only son, Hartas, on one occasion.

Canon Godfrey had been spending an hour with Squire Theyn—spending it mostly in earnest entreaty; and he had left the Grange with the Squire’s ‘words of high disdain’ ringing in his ears painfully.

‘Ah’ll ha’ neä mair on’t!’ repeated the old man; and Hartas helped greatly to confirm him in this decision.

The younger man’s dislike to anything that could touch his liberty was at least as strong as the same feeling in the elder one. There were some who said that Squire Theyn and his son were not unworthy of each other; and it is possible that the saying had more in it than appeared on the surface. Certainly it was one to bear investigation, had any analytically minded person been drawn to interest himself in the matter. And a student bent upon humanity might have travelled far before finding two more unique subjects for his research.

## CHAPTER II.

### ▲ NORTH YORKSHIRE FISHER-MAIDEN.

‘She was a careless, fearless girl,  
And made her answer plain,  
Outspoken she to earl or churl,  
Kindhearted in the main.’

CHRISTINA ROSSETTI.

WHY Thorhilda’s thoughts, as she stood there by the margent of the sea, should suddenly be drawn to her brother Hartas she could hardly have told in that first moment. She had not been thinking of him as she stood, letting the breezes blow upon her forehead, turning from watching the wide, white-flecked sea to note the fisher folk on the beach and on the quays. She knew nothing of any of these save by hearsay, and yet she was aware of something prompting her interest in a group of tall, handsome fisher-girls who were down by the edge of the tide—such girls as you would hardly see anywhere else in England for strength and straightness, for roundness of form and bright, fresh healthfulness of countenance.

They wore blue flannel petticoats, and rough, dark-blue masculine-looking guernseys of their own knitting. Their heads were either bare, or covered with picturesque hoods of cotton—blue, pink, lilac, buff, pale blue. One, the tallest of them, and decidedly the handsomest, had no bonnet at all, and her rich chestnut hair blew about in the breeze in shining rings and curls in a way that attracted Thorhilda’s attention, and even her admiration, though as a rule she had slight sympathy with the ‘admired disorder’ school of æsthetics. And as she watched the girl, all at once there darted a new thought across her brain, a new and disturbing conviction.



'That is Barbara Burdas !' she said to herself. Then she smiled a little, and wondered at the force of a feeling that had so far-off a cause.

Miss Theyn knew very little of Barbara Burdas. Though the reputation of the handsome fisher-girl was rapidly spreading along the coast from Flamborough Head to Hild's Haven, her name had seldom been heard within the walls of the Rectory at Market Yarmouth ; but one day Canon Godfrey had spoken in a somewhat grieving tone to his wife concerning some new rumour which had reached his ear—a story in which both Barbara's bravery and the influence of her beauty were brought into prominence. Mrs. Godfrey tried to prevent his sorrow from deepening.

'It will do the girl no harm,' she said, with her usual somewhat emphatic vivacity. 'Barbara Burdas is as good a woman as I am, and as strong. Think of her life, of all she is doing for her grandfather and the children ! Oh, a little admiration won't harm Barbara ! It may even be some lightness in her life—some relief ; I hope it will. She has not known much pleasure.'

Thorhilda being present, Canon Godfrey had made no reply at that moment ; but later he had confided to his wife the things that he had heard in the parish concerning Barbara Burdas and her own nephew, Hartas Theyn. Subsequently some guesses had been made by Thorhilda, but they were little more than guesses, arising out of a word dropped by her aunt in an unguarded moment.

Now, seeing Barbara there on the beach, a sudden desire to know something of the truth came upon her ; and after a few moments' consideration she left the promenade, and went down between the nursemaids and the babies, the donkeys and the Bath-chairs, to where the shore was wet and shining, and, for the present, almost untrodden. The wind seemed freer, and the sun brighter there by the changing edge of the sea.

Miss Theyn was not a woman to saunter on aimlessly, to wait for an opportunity of speaking to Bab alone. She went straight across the stretch of brown sea-tangle, going directly to the group of laughing girls, with that firm nerve and presence which comes mostly of good health and right training. The laughter died down as she came nearer ; and with apparent courtesy Bab and her friends half turned and drew together waitingly. They were not unused to conversation with curious strangers.

Thorhilda was the first to speak. She looked at Bab as she did so, and there was involuntary admiration in her look, which Bab saw, and did not resent. Yet there was an unconscious touch of scorn about the fisher-girl's mouth, a half-disdain in the inquiring glance she fixed upon the lady whose delicate gray silk dress had come in contact with the slimy weed and the coarse, brown sand, and whose small dainty boots were surely being ruined as they sank and slipped among the great drifting fronds that lay heaped upon the shale. Thorhilda understood the disdain.



'Are you not Barbara Burdas?' she asked, in her clear yet gentle voice, as she drew quite near.

Bab hesitated a moment, during which her lips compressed themselves firmly, yet without discharging the scorn from the curves at the corners. Her gaze was still steady and inquiring. A slight tinge of colour crept under the creamy olive of her cheek.

She was about to reply; but it was a moment too late. Her friend, Nan Tyas, a young fish-wife, almost as tall, almost as handsome as herself, but in a different way, had come to an end of her slight store of patience.

Looking over Bab's shoulder, her keen dark eyes glittering as she stared straight into Miss Theyn's face, an expression of suspicion on every feature, she asked:

'Wheä telled ya her neäme?'

This was meant to be facetious, and there was *esprit de corps* enough among the girls to cause it to be received as it was meant. A general titter went round, in the midst of which another voice found courage to remark:

'Mebbe she kenned it of her oän sharpness.'

A second laugh was heard, less restrained than before.

Thorhilda looked on with interest, but not smilingly, still less resentfully. The moment and its experience were new to her. Moreover, she discerned that a grave clear look from Bab was quelling the tendency to sarcasm.

'Haud yer tongues, ya fools,' Bab said quietly, but with a certain force in the tone of her voice.

Then she turned to Miss Theyn, the lingering displeasure still about her mouth. Speaking with decidedly less of the northern accent and intonation than before, she said:

'Yes, Barbara Burdas; that's what they call ma. Ah'm noän shamed o' my name. . . . Did ya want anything wi' me?'

'Yes; I wished to speak to you for awhile. I do not know that I have much of importance to say at present; but I wished to know you, to ask you one or two questions. I thought that perhaps your friends would permit me to speak to you alone.'

A certain power in Miss Theyn's glance as she looked round upon the six or seven young women might have as much to do with their compliance as the tone of expectant authority which she involuntarily used. They smiled satirically to each other; and then went gliding away with the strong easy grace of movement which seems their birthright. Thorhilda watched them admiringly for a few moments; then she turned to walk with Bab in the opposite direction; and for a little while there was silence; but it was not at all an awkward silence. Though the moment was not a facile one, the elements of awkwardness did not exist for these two, who walked there side by side, so near, yet so widely separated.

Again it was Thorhilda who spoke first. She did so naturally, and without constraint.



'Thank you for telling me your name,' she said. 'It is only fair that I should tell you mine in return ; it is Thorhilda Theyn.'

Bab did not quite stay the firm step that was going on over the beach ; but Miss Theyn perceived the partial arresting of movement ; she divined the cause of it ; and she understood the presence of mind that gave Bab the power to go on again as if nothing had happened.

'Then you'll live at the Grange,' Bab said, speaking as if even curiosity were far from her.

'No,' Thorhilda replied. 'I live at Market Yarburch, at the Rectory ; but the Grange is my real home.'

An' the Squire is yer father ?

'Yes. . . . And Hartas Theyn is my brother.'

The sun was still shining down with brilliancy upon the blue waters of the North Sea, upon the white wavelets that broke gently but just below where the two girls were sauntering. A couple of sea-gulls were crying softly overhead ; the fishing boats in the offing were ploughing their way northward. A light breeze fluttered the loops of gray ribbon that fastened Thorhilda's dress. Bab's attention seemed drawn in rather a marked way to the ribbon. Her eyes followed its fluttering as she walked on in silence, but it was not of the ribbon that she was thinking.

Perhaps she was hardly thinking at all in any true sense of the word ; yet she was aware of some new and gentle influence that was stealing upon her swiftly, awakening an admiration that was almost emotion ; subduing the natural pride that was in her ; the strong natural independence of her spirit, an independence of which she was as utterly unconscious as she was of the ordinary pulsations of her heart ; but which was yet one of the dominant traits of her nature ; and produced difficulties, perplexities, which she had often found bewildering, but never more bewildering than at the present moment. Here was one, far above her by birth, by beauty, by position, by education, yet possessing a something (Bab did not know it to be sympathy) that had the power to charm, to extract the bitterness from pain, and the sting from an unacknowledged dread. Bab hesitated some time, sighing as she repressed one impulse after another toward unsuitable speech. The right words would not come. At last came some awkward ones.

'If ya've anything to saäy, Miss Theyn, ya'd better say it,' the girl remarked, decidedly more in the tone of one urging blame than deprecating it.

'It is evident that you have nothing to fear,' Thorhilda replied, turning to look into the proud yet winning face so near her own.

'Fear !' exclaimed Bab, a great scorn flashing in her eyes and on her lips. 'Fear ! what would I ha' to fear, think ya ? If ya dream that I'm feared o' yon brother o' yours, or of ony mischief he can bring about for me, ya can put away the notion without a second thowt. It's as big a mistake as you've ever made. Fear ! I'm



noän feared of him. . . . Noä! . . . But Ah know what it is, Miss Theyn. I know what's brought you here ; *you've feared for him*—for your brother! You've feared he's goin' to disgrace hisself, an' you, wi' marryin' a flither\*-picker. Don't hev no fear o' that sort, Miss Theyn!' And here even Bab's voice grew fainter as her breathing became overpowered by betraying emotion. 'Don't hev no fear o' that sort. I'll . . . well, I'll let ya know when he's i' daänger!'

It was evident that Bab had not intended to end her speech thus ; and other things more important were evident also. Thorhilda's experience had not been wide, but she had her woman's instincts to guide her, and her instinct told her plainly that Bab's emotion could only have one cause. This and other new knowledge complicated the feeling which had brought Miss Theyn to saunter there, in the very middle of Ulvstan Bight, with Barbara Burdas.

Other complications were at hand. Thorhilda herself hardly knew what drew her to notice that Bab's perturbation had suddenly and greatly increased, but instantly her eyes followed the direction of her companion's eyes, and almost to her distress she saw that the figure advancing rapidly toward them over the beach was the figure of her brother Hartas. Thorhilda's exclamation of concern did not escape Bab's notice.

### CHAPTER III.

#### ULVSTAN BIGHT.

'For hast thou not a herald on my cheek,  
To tell the coming nearer of thy ways,  
And in my veins a stronger blood that flows,  
A bell that strikes on pulses of my heart,  
Submissive life that proudly comes and goes  
Through eyes that burn, and speechless lips that part?  
And hast thou not a hidden life in mine,  
In thee a soul which none may know for thine?'

MARK ANDRÉ RAFFALOVITCH.

HARTAS THEYN was coming down the beach slowly, yet with more intentness in his deliberate gait than was usually to be observed. He had seen from the road by the Forecliff that the lady who was walking with Barbara Burdas was none other than his elder sister.

Thorhilda consciously repressed all outward sign as she watched his approach ; her face did not betray the sadness she felt as she noted his slouching air—his shabby, shapeless clothing. The very hat he wore, an old gray felt, seemed to betray what manner of man its wearer had come to be ; and as he came nearer, his hands in the pockets of his trousers, a pipe between his lips, a sullen, defiant, yet questioning look in the depths of his dark eyes, a touch of something that was almest dread entered into her feeling. It

\* Flithers=limpets, used for bait.



was but momentary, this strange emotion ; and she offered her greeting without more restraint than was usual between them.

'You did not expect to see me here, Hartas ?' she said pleasantly.

'No, I didn't,' replied the young man, after half a minute's irritating silence. 'An' if I'm to tell the truth, I don't know 'at I'd any particular wish to see you.'

And his eyes flashed a little, as if conscious of a certain amount of daring in his speech.

If this daring were ventured upon for Bab's sake, or because of her presence there, it was a mistake ; but this Hartas had not discernment enough to perceive. Bab was looking on with interest, but she repressed all tendency to smile.

Thorhilda replied instantly and easily.

'That is not polite, Hartas,' she said. 'But let it pass. I did not come here to irritate you. And——'

'Could you say what you did come for ?' interrupted Hartas, with a certain coarse sharpness in his tone.

'Readily. I came down to make the acquaintance of Barbara Burdas. I wished to know her ; I had wished it for some time. So far, I am glad I did come. Don't try to make me regret it.'

'I don't spend my breath in such efforts as them, as a rule,' rejoined the young man, taking his pipe from his mouth, and speaking with evident strong effort to restrain himself. 'But have a care ! I don't force myself upon *your* friends.'

'True,' said Thorhilda ; and again, before she could find the word she wished to use, the opportunity was taken from her.

'D'ya want yer sister to think she's forced herself upon a friend o' yours ?' Bab asked, still seeming as if she tried to restrain the sarcastic smile that appeared to play about her lips almost ceaselessly. Hartas Theyn's manner changed instantly in replying to Bab. It was as if the better nature within him asserted itself all at once ; his higher manhood responded to her slightest touch.

'I don't want no quarrellin',' he replied, speaking with a mildness and softness so new to him that even his sister discerned it with an infinite surprise. 'I don't want no quarrellin', an' it's only fair to expect that if I keep away fra *them*, as I always hev done' [this with an unmitigated scorn], 'they'll hev the goodness to keep away fra me. Friends o' *that sort* 's best separated ; so I've heard tell afore to-day.'

Then, warming with his own eloquence, Hartas turned again to Thorhilda, saying emphatically :

'I mean no harm ; an' as I said just now, I want no quarrellin' ; but if you want to keep out o' mischief, keep away fra me an from all interference in my affairs. I can manage them for myself thank ya all the same.'

Thorhilda hesitated a moment, recognising the effort Hartas had made, and also the element of fairness in his words, yet it was inevitable that other thoughts should force themselves upon her.



‘Hartas, do you remember that you are my brother?’ she asked after a moment of swift, deep thinking.

‘An’ what o’ that? It’s neither your fault nor mine.’

‘No; it is no one’s fault; but it is a fact, a fact that means much, and, for me, involves much. If I could forget it I should be—well, something I hope I am not. Fortunately for me I cannot forget it; more fortunately still, I cannot altogether ignore it. I cannot let you and your life’s deepest affairs pass by me as if no tie existed. . . . I do not wish to forget or to ignore. Why should you wish it?’

‘Because I’m made of a different sort o’ stuff—a commoner sort, if you will; an’ because I’m cast in a different mould. Say what you like, it isn’t easy for you to look down—fool as I am I can see as much as that. But, *take my word for it, it isn’t any easier for me to look up.* An’ why should either you or me strive to look up or down against the grain? Because the world expects it! Then let it expect. I’m good at disappointin’ expectations o’ that sort. We’re better apart, *an’ you know it!*’ Then turning away, a little excited, a little angry, disquieted by nervous perturbations of various kinds, he lifted his eyes to discern the approach of influences yet more disturbing to him than any he had encountered that luckless morning. And yet it was only two ladies who were approaching, two elderly and, more or less, elegantly dressed ladies. Hartas instantly divined that they were his aunts in search of Thorhilda.

‘Heaven help us!’ he exclaimed. ‘Here’s two more of ’em! Bab, let’s fly. There’s the cave!’

‘*Me fly!*’ Bab exclaimed indignantly. ‘It will be the first time!’ And as she stood watching the two ladies advancing slowly over the slimy, slippery stones and tangle, again the half-satirical smile gathered about her mouth. Hartas watched her face with admiration expressed on every feature of his own; and Thorhilda stood, controlling the fear of a scene that was mingled with her expectancy. Mrs. Godfrey, the Canon’s stately and still beautiful wife; Mrs. Kerne, the sister of Squire Theyne, an elderly and rugged-featured woman, the widow of a rich shipowner, had not much in common; and therefore, very wisely, seldom sought each other’s society. There certainly seemed to be something strange in the fact of their leaving the wide sea-wall together, and coming down over the wet unstable beach. Besides, there was that in the expression of one of them that was at least ominous.



## CHAPTER IV.

## SQUIRE THEYN'S SISTER, AND SOME OTHERS.

'O how this spring of love resembleth  
 The uncertain glory of an April day;  
 Which now shows all the beauty of the sun  
 And by-and-by a cloud takes all away.'

SHAKESPEARE.

'THINK again, Bab,' Hartas whispered to the only quite self-possessed one of the waiting three. 'Think again! There's the Pirate's Hole!'

'Go into it, if you're frightened,' replied Bab curtly.

Hartas was silenced; but the unpleasant anticipation of the moment was not done away. He smoked on more vigorously than before. Thorhilda uttered some small nothing to Bab, and then turned to meet the two approaching figures. To her comfort her Aunt Milicent's face was the face it usually was—beautiful, kind, smiling; free from all disfigurement of untoward expression. She was not a woman to mar any influence she might have by uncontrolled feminine petulance.

'Well!' she said cheerfully to Thorhilda. 'I thought you were to wait for me on the promenade, dear! But how lovely this is! How breezy!—And there is Hartas! I haven't seen him for an age. . . . Hartas—how do you do? And how are you all at the Grange? We were thinking of driving round that way, but now we needn't. . . . All quite well? Delightful! But, of course, that doesn't include your poor Aunt Averil. How I should like to hear for once that she was quite well!'

So Mrs. Godfrey ran on in her easy, woman-of-the-world way; glancing at Barbara Burdas, understanding, feeling acutely, all the incongruity of the elements that made up the surrounding atmosphere; knowing herself to be ten times less distressed than Mrs. Kerne, who stood by her side, yet not too near—silent, hard, stern, disapproving to the uttermost. And yet Mrs. Godfrey's social nerves should surely have been as keenly sensitive as those of Squire Theyn's sister. All the world knew of the upbringing of the latter in a household where a fox-hunting mother had been the only feminine influence; and a seldom sober squire, with his like-minded brother, the ruling masculine powers. There had only been one son, the present Squire Theyn; and only one daughter, the present Mrs. Kerne; who had attained the height of her ambition in marrying a rich and vulgar man. The rich man was dead; his widow was a rich woman; and none the more pleasing because during a dozen years of companionship she had managed to add some of her husband's coarsenesses and vulgarities to her own innate ones. The force of natural assimilation was never more clearly proved.



Mrs. Godfrey's early recollections were of a different order. She was one of the five daughters of the Rector of Luneworth, a small village in a midland county—a village where a kindly duke and duchess had reigned supreme, making much of the Rector's pretty children, and affording them many advantages as they grew up which could not otherwise have been obtained. As all the neighbourhood knew, the Miss Chalgroves had shared the lessons that masters came down from London to give to the Ladies Haddingley. And, later in life, some of the Rector's daughters had made a first social appearance on the same evening, and in the same place, as some of their more favoured friends. And they were truly friends, who had remained friendly—much to Milicent Godfrey's permanent good, pleasure, and satisfaction—much to her sister Averil's deterioration. Averil had been the eldest of them all—a clever, fretful, nervous woman, who had all her life magnified her slight ailments into illnesses, and who had condescended to share her sister Grace's home when the latter married Squire Theyn, with an inexpressible disgust. That her sister Milicent had never offered her a couple of rooms at the Rectory at Market Yarburgh remained a standing cause for bitterness. It was not likely to be removed so long as Mrs. Godfrey should care for her husband's peace of mind.

It was the quick sight of Mrs. Kerne, the Squire's widowed sister, that had discerned the group upon the beach. She had met Mrs. Godfrey at the turn leading down to the promenade, accepted her invitation to walk with her to meet Thorhilda with an indifference that was more than merely ungraciousness, and when they found that Thorhilda had left the promenade, her instinct led her to express her shallow satisfaction in somewhat irritating speech. Peering round above the rim of her gold eye-glass, she exclaimed at last :

‘There is Miss Theyn!—there is *your niece*!’—speaking as if she herself were no relation whatever. ‘What can have led her to seek the society of fish-wives, I wonder? . . . Ah, I see! Master Hartas is there. That accounts. But I did not know that the brother and sister were on such affectionate terms as to induce her to lend her distinguished countenance to such as Bab Burdas for *his* sake. Dear me! What a new departure!’

Mrs. Kerne was a short, stout woman, moving with the ungainly movement natural to her age and proportions. Her red face grew redder as she descended the narrow, unsavoury road that led to the beach, and her usually unamiable expression did not grow more amiable. By the time she had arrived at the point when it was necessary to shake hands with Thorhilda she had—perhaps unaware, poor woman!—acquired a most forbidding aspect. Thorhilda shrank, as from a coming blow; but this was only for a second; her larger nature conquered, and she stood considerate, courageous.

The influence of Barbara Burdas alone held Hartas Theyn to



the spot of wet, weed-strewn sand on which he stood, his pipe still in his mouth, his big, unkept brown hands still in the pockets of his trousers. The mere sight of him seemed to awaken the ire of Mrs. Kerne. That he should stand there before her, calmly smoking, with Barbara Burdas by his side, was too much for the small amount of equanimity at her disposal. No description made by means of pen or pencil could do justice to the expression of her face as she broke the brief silence, sniffing the air as she did so as an ill-tempered horse sniffs it at the beginning of the mischief he has it in his head to bring about.

'I can't say that I see exactly why I've been brought down here,' she remarked, glancing from her niece to her even less favoured nephew. 'What is the meaning of it? An' why are you standing there, Hartas, looking more like a fool than usual, if that's possible? . . . I suppose the truth is I've been tricked! brought down here to be introduced to your——'

'Stop a minute,' Hartas interposed, at last taking the pipe from between his lips, putting it behind him, and letting his dark eyes flash their fullest power upon Mrs. Kerne. 'Stop a minute,' he said. 'If you've been brought down here, it's been by no will o' mine. I haven't seen you this year past, and wouldn't ha' minded if I hadn't seen you for years to come. . . . All the same, say what you've got to say to me, but take my advice for once, leave other folks alone—especially folks 'at's never me'll'd wi' you.'

'It isn't much I've got to say to you,' Mrs. Kerne replied, the angry colour deepening on her face as she spoke, and a keen light darting from her small eyes. 'It isn't much I've got to say; an' first I may as well just thank you for your plain speaking. I'll not forget it! You may have cause to remember it yourself, sooner or later. It 'ill not be the first time 'at the readiness of your tongue has had to do with the emptiness of your pocket.'

'Mebbe not,' interrupted Hartas. 'I'd as soon my pockets were empty as try to fill 'em wi' toadyin' rich relations . . . . Most things has their price.'

'I'm glad you've found that out,' replied Mrs. Kerne. 'But you've more to learn yet, if all be true 'at one hears an' sees. However, as you say, perhaps I'd better leave you to go to ruin by your own road. You've been travellin' on it a good bit now, by all accounts, an' from the very first I've felt that tryin' to stop you would be like tryin' to stop a thunderbolt.'

'Just like that; an' about as much of a mistake,' said Hartas, with an irritating attempt to seem cool. But the effort was obvious, and Thorhilda, who discerned all too plainly whither these amenities were likely to lead, turning to her brother, said gently:

'Hartas, it is my fault that this has happened. I couldn't foresee it, of course. But let us put an end to it. Aunt Katherine will take cold if she remains here on the wet beach any longer; and we



are going home—Aunt Milicent and myself. Hadn't you better go too? And shall you be at the Grange to-morrow, in the afternoon? I want to see you. Don't refuse me, Hartas; I don't often ask favours of you.'

It was strange how Thorhilda's voice, speaking gently, kindly, quietly, seemed to change the elements of that untoward atmosphere. Mrs. Kerne's countenance relaxed all unconsciously; Mrs. Godfrey smiled, and turned with a pleasant word to Barbara Burdas, who had been standing there during those brief moments, silent, wondering, perplexed, and not a little saddened. Bab knew nothing of Tennyson, but the spirit of one of the poet's verses was rankling in her heart—

'If this be high, what is it to be low?'

Bab could not put the inquiry in these words, but in her own way, and of her own self, she asked the question; and later, in her own home, it came back upon her with fuller force than ever. Was this the surrounding of the man who had seemed to step down from some higher place, to condescend in speaking to her, to seem as if he stood on the verge of ruin in making known to her his deep and passionate affection? Bab understood much, more even than she knew that she understood, but naturally, from her social standpoint, there was a good deal that was confusing to her. Hitherto she had not cared to know of any dividing lines there might be in ranks above her own, and though discernment had seldom failed her in such cases of pretension as she had come across, she yet had no knowledge of the great gulfs that are fixed between class and class, and are only now and then bridged over by bridges of gold. But ignorant as she might be, she had yet discerned, instantly and instinctively, that Mrs. Godfrey and Miss Theyn were at least as far above Hartas as Hartas was above herself, and that the lines on which Mrs. Kerne's life was laid down were more familiar to him, and, in a certain sense, more consonant, than the lines of the two other lives into which Bab had had so mere a glimpse. Yet brief as the insight had been, it had developed an infinitude of suggestive ideas; and it was significant that Bab's thought was drawn to dwell mainly upon the gentler, the higher phase of the humanity presented to her in those few moments. Naturally, her thinking and wondering was of a vague and inexact order, but it was not without its influence, for she recognised clearly that the hour of her meeting with Miss Theyn was the most striking landmark of her hitherto uneventful history.



## CHAPTER V.

## ON THE FORECLIFF.

'Whither away, Delight?

Thou camest but now; wilt thou so soon depart,

And give me up to-night?

For weeks of lingering pain and smart,

But one half-hour of comfort for my heart !'

GEORGE HERBERT.

'YES; I'm glad to have seen them,' Bab said to herself, as she stood alone at the door of her grandfather's cottage at night.

The children were all in bed, little Stevie with his grandfather, Jack and Zeb in another bed in the far corner of the attic. Ailsie was in Bab's room, down below, a little square, dark place, with only room for a bed and a chair and the box in which Bab kept her 'Sunday things'—her own and Ailsie's, and the latter were more than the former. Few things pleased Bab more than to be able to buy some bit of bright ribbon for Ailsie's hat, or a kerchief for Ailsie's neck. No child on the Forecliff was more warmly and prettily clad than Ailsie Burdas.

It was moonlight now, the tide was half high, and the bay was filled from point to point with the sparkling of the silent silver sea. There were a few fishing-cobles in the offing, two or three more were landing, making a picturesque group of dark, moving outlines upon the white margin of the waters. Bab was no artist, no poet, but something of the poet temperament there was in the girl, and that something was heightened at the present moment by the emotion she was contending against, striving to hide its intensity even from her own self. Bab had never acknowledged, even in her inmost thought, that there was any possibility of Hartas Theyn winning from her a return of the affection he professed so passionately. Rather was she conscious of that spirit of rebellion which so often dawns with a dawning love, the spirit of fear, of shrinking reluctance.

Hitherto the thought of becoming the wife of a man whose position in life was superior to her own had held but little temptation for her. She was not dazzled by the knowledge of Hartas Theyn's higher standing, of his better birth, of his reputed wealth. She would have been glad to exchange her life for one that offered greater freedom from care, greater ease, more ability to procure for herself and those belonging to her some of the things that were now counted as luxuries not to be thought of; but she had never been prepared to sacrifice herself too completely for such advantages as these. She was young and strong, and as willing to work as she was able. Why, then, should she dream of purchasing at a great price the things she did not very greatly desire to have?

But now to-night other thoughts came across her as she stood



there, other visions filled her brain, vague visions of a gentler and more beautiful life—a life far from all roughness and rudeness—in a word, the life that might be lived by the woman to whom Miss Theyn would say, 'My sister!'

'*My sister!*' Bab had said the words to herself; then she uttered them half audibly, with a thrill like that of the lover who first says to himself, 'My wife.'

Could Thorhilda Theyn have known it all, could she have looked but one moment into Bab's heart and brain as the girl stood there by the cottage door, feeling almost as if her very breathing were restrained by the force of the new vision, the compelling touch of the new affection, surely for very humility Miss Theyn would have been sad at heart. It was well for her peace that she might not know.

Bab had never before come into contact with any woman of such winning grace, such refined loveliness; never before had she been moved by such attractive gentleness. And there was something more than these—a mystic and far-off something that drew the untrained fisher-girl with a strong and strange fascination, a fascination that she could neither understand nor resist.

'I'd lay my life down for her,' she said, blushing as she spoke for the warmth of her own word, though no one was by to hear it, or to hold her in contempt for evermore for having used it. The blush was the sign of her heart's inexperience.

Thinking thus of Miss Theyn, it was not wonderful that softened thoughts of Miss Theyn's brother should come; that his humility of manner to herself should appear in a new and more attractive light; that the remembrance of his affection should have more force to touch her own; that his oft-repeated assurance of life-long protection and unfailing devotion should appeal more strongly to her imagination. Ah, what a dream it was! how bright! how sweet! how possible! but, alas, how very brief!

Bab would not look at the ending of the dream: she put it away resolutely. Some day she would be compelled to look at it, but not to-night, not to-night. It was as if she herself were pleading with herself for a little good, a little beauty, a little softness, a little ease. Some day she might have to pay the price for the dream. Well, let the demand be made, and she would honour it—for Miss Theyn's sake she would honour it, though it cost all that she had, to the last limit.

'Yes, I'd do that; I'd lay down my life if so 'twere to be that she needed it!' Bab repeated, still standing there, watching the dark, picturesque grouping of the men and boats upon the silver of the beach, the swiftly-changing lights and shadows seeming to correspond with the changes of her own thought and emotion.

Presently a voice broke upon the silence, not roughly or rudely, yet with a strangely jarring effect upon her present mood, an effect that was for the instant almost as the first rising of anger. No intrusion could have been more unwelcome.



## CHAPTER VI.

‘ABOVE THE SOUND OF THE SEA.’

“‘Jessie, Jessie Cameron,  
Hear me but this once,” quoth he.  
“Good luck go with you, neighbour’s son,  
But I’m no mate for you,” quoth she.  
Day was verging toward the night,  
There beside the moaning sea,  
Dimness overtook the light,  
There where the breakers be.  
“O Jessie, Jessie Cameron,  
I have loved you long and true.”  
“Good luck go with you, neighbour’s son,  
But I’m no mate for you.”’

CHRISTINA ROSSETTI.

THE voice was the voice of David Andoe, the brother of Nan Tyas, a brave, strong, young fisherman, with that slow solemnity of speech and movement which seems always to have been won out of the moments of strife with death and danger. David was not surprised to find Bab standing there, though it was nearly midnight and the world about her was all asleep. Like others of his craft, he was used to the keeping of untimely hours.

No, he had no surprise ; but an unusual sense of satisfaction came upon him, almost overpowering him for the moment.

‘Waitin’ for daäylight, Bab?’ he asked, stopping near the door of the cottage and resting upon the ground the end of an oar which he was carrying homeward for repairs. It looked like a lance as it stood edgewise in the moonlight ; and he who carried it might certainly have passed for a young knight of an older time had his dress been other than the knitted blue guernsey and the slouching sou’wester of the north coast. There was little difference between Bab’s guernsey and his own ; his was knitted in a pattern of broad stripes, hers in a fine ‘honey-comb’—the shape was the same precisely.

Bab replied to his question with discouraging carelessness.

‘No,’ she said ; I’ll get a good sleep in yet afore the sun’s above the sea. I’m bound to be at the flither-beds afore five o’clock. . . What hev ya got this tide? Not much to boast about, Ah reckon.’

‘No,’ David replied, half sadly. ‘It strikes me ’at it’ll be a good while afore anybody hereabouts has aught to boast on again. If you could put a stop to the trawlers to-night, it ’ud take years to fill the sea as full o’ fish as it was afore them devil’s instriments was invented.’

‘The devil has nought to do wi’ them,’ said Bab, perhaps taking a wider outlook for contradiction’s sake. ‘There’s more i’ the heaven’s above, and i’ the e’th beneath, an’ i’ the waters under the e’th, than such as you an’ me knows on. . . . Let ’em be wi’ their



trawlers, an' their steam fishin' yawls, an' all the rest of it. D'ya think they can alter the ways of Providence? Let 'em be !'

David was silenced for a moment, not feeling quite sure in his own mind that this hopeful philosophy was being countenanced by actual circumstance. Yet for him, as for Bab, there would have been immense, almost insuperable difficulty in trying to set aside, or ignore, the old, tried belief in the wisdom of the ways of Providence. In this they were happy, in having been trained from childhood to at least reverence for a creed that held the Fatherhood of God, the Brotherhood of Christ, as facts that none might disbelieve save to his soul's imperilling. Though no intimate spiritual influence had yet been theirs to draw them to attempt any spiritual life of their own, they were yet aware that such a life might be lived ; and David's inner experience had not been so colourless as some of his more fervid mates imagined.

But, like most of his class, he was not given to wear his heart upon his sleeve.

His life, generally, had much in it of which the little world about him was only very dimly aware. He was one of a rather large family. The father was not a sober man ; the mother was an ill-tempered woman, dirty withal, and intolerably selfish ; caring nothing for the comfort or well-being of her family so that she might sit the long day through upon the doorstep of her cottage, idle, half-clad, and almost repulsive in her personal untidiness. Yet is it strange to confess that David could never rid himself of the old affection for her, the old yearning for her that had so beset him when he was a little lad, suffering keenly from her cruel humours, yet suffering silently and always forgivingly ? He had loved his mother and worked for her, and taken thought for her when there was no one else ; but he knew that his mother loved not him.

Then naturally, almost inevitably, the affectionateness of his whole strong affectionate nature had gathered itself together in another love—a deeper and more yearning and more passionate love ; but, so far, this had seemed to give no sign, save in the keen and ceaseless aching of his heart. No lonely woman ever suffered a lonelier life, or was ever more sensitive to the lightest touch of alleviation.

At the present moment not even Bab herself knew the tremulous way in which one instinct was fighting against another within him.

'Go home now ; leave this preoccupied and unimpressionable girl till a more favourable moment.' So spoke the instinct of common sense. But another and a stronger instinct was there—too strong to utter itself in words. It was by the depth of its silence that he was influenced ; and he made a mistake, and he stayed.

'It's all very well to talk i' that way, Bab,' he said at last, answering her word as if no other thought had intervened. 'But



when one thinks o' what Ulvstan Bight was nobbut twenty years ago, an' what it is now, one can't but feel half maddened. Why, there isn't a fifth part o' the fish browt into the bay 'at used to be browt in. *It isn't there to be caught*; how can it, wi' the spawn lyin' killed at the bottom o' the sea, mashed wi' the trawl-beam as completely as a railway train 'ud mash a basket of eggs?

'They tell me, them 'at knows, 'at the spawn doesn't lie at the sea-bottom. It floats on the top.'

'That's true of a few sorts,' said David, half glad that the girl should reply to him at all; yet suspecting an allusion to one whom he hated with a hate proportionate to his love for Bab. 'It's true of a few sorts; but it isn't true o' the sorts we depend upon for a livin'. I've had proof anuff o' that; an' so hes my father. Why, he was sayin' nobbut yesterday 'at he'd browt into Ulvstan as many as thirteen hundred big fish at a single catch. But he'll never do it again—no, nor no other man.'

'The last season warn't such a bad season for herrin's,' said Bab, still speaking in a conciliatory, but only half-interested way. David Andoe was roused even more than before.

'Herrin's!' he exclaimed. 'There's nowt like the number caught nowadays 'at used to be. Why, I've known mysel' a single boat to take eighteen lasts at a catch; an' sell 'em for ten pound a last.\* An' 'twas a reg'lar thing wiv us, when Ah was a lad, te fetch in four or five lasts of a mornin'. Now you may go till you're gray-headed, an' you'll not do it. An' ' (here David's voice changed and softened, and betrayed him to his own great pain), 'an' it's moän 'at Ah care so much for money, Bab, nut on my oän account. Thou knows that! Thou knows well anuff why Ah'd be fain to see things as they once was, when every man 'at chose to work could live by his work, whether on land or sea. Ah'm naught at landwork mysel', nut havin' been bred to it; or Ah'd soon try an' see whether Ah couldn't mak' better addlins nor Ah can noo. . . . An' it's that keeps ma back; an' hinders ma fra speakin' when my heart's achin to saäy a word.'

'Then *don't* say it, David!' protested Bab eagerly; and the tone of her voice attested to the uttermost her sincerity of appeal.

'I *mun* saäy it,' David replied passionately. 'Tho' Ah can't bard the notion o' askin' to leave thy gran'father's home, wi' never another home ready for thee to go to. But I'd try to mak' one ready, Bab; I'd try all I could to mak' thee a better one! For it breaks my heart to see thee workin' an' toilin' like ony slave. Ay, it is bad to bear, when Ah'd work mysel' te skin an' bone te save thee. But what can Ah do when neet after neet we toil an' moil, an' come back i' the mornin' wi' barely anuff te pay for the oil i' the lamp, let alone for the bait, or the wear an' tear o' the lines an'

\* A last consists of ten thousand herrings; but a hundred and twenty-four is counted to each hundred. At Yarmouth they count (or used to do so) one hundred and thirty-two.



nets? What can Ah do? An’ all the while me fearin’ ’at somebody else—an’ that somebody none so worthy—’ll step in, an’ spoil my life for me. . . . Bab, doesn’t thee care for me a little? An’ me sa troubled wi’ carin’ for thee! It takes the life out o’ me, because there’s nought else, no, nought nowheres. An’ what is the good o’ life to a man if there’s noän to care so as how he lives it? Noän to see whether the misery on it’s more nor he can bear; noän to help him i’ the bearin’; noän to say “Well done!” when he’s got the victory; an’ noän to speak a word o’ comfort when he falls to the ground? What’s the good o’ life when one hes te live it like that?’

‘You might as well say, “What’s the good o’ life at all?” if ya put it so,’ Bab replied, sadly and gravely. The visions of the past half-hour had not been all illumined by the sun.

‘I hope I’d never be bold enough i’ the wickedness to saäy *that!*’ David replied. ‘Still it’s often been forced in upon me ’at if folks miss the happiness o’ life at the beginning they don’t easily o’ertake it after. Ah don’t know ’at Ah’m so keen set o’ hevin’ a happy life; still—Ah may say it to thee, Bab—*Ah’m doled o’ misery*, the misery ’at sits at a man’s fireside, an’ dulls the lowe o’ the coal, an’ taints the tast ov his every bite and sup, no matter how good it be! Eh, but Ah *am* doled o’ misery o’ that sort, Bab; an’ o’ some other sorts. Thee doesn’t know the wretchedness of havin’ every word—the gentlest ya can utter, replied to wiv a snap o’ the tongue, an’ a toss o’ the head, an’ a rasp o’ the voice ’at silences ya like a blow frev a hammer, an’ makes the heart i’ yer body sink as if a stone had been dropped te the middle on’t; an’ all the while the soul within ya achin’, an’ achin’, an’ achin’ for the sound of a kindly word till ya’re fit to lay doon yer life wi’ the longin’. An’ it’s not for so many days an’ weeks ya ha’ to bear it—no, nor not for so many months an’ years—*it’s yer life ’at’s goin’*. . . . But, eh, me, what an Ah saying? Thou knows nought o’ life o’ *that* kind, Bab, an’ thou shall never know, so it be that Ah hev my waäy. It all depends on thyself! . . . Doesn’t thee care for me a little, nobbut a little, just anuff to lead thee to promise me to wait a bit? Things’ll be better by-an’-by; and there’ll be two on us to fight instead o’ only thyself. Can’t thee saäy a word?’

Bab had listened quite silently; but not without strongly-repressed emotion. The emotion evident in David Andoe had alone been sufficient to awaken her own; and there was more behind. Bab’s first girlish though of love and marriage had been bound up with the thought of David. Many a morning he had helped her to fill her flither-basket out of the rocks at the foot of Yarva-Ness; many a time he had helped her to bring up the lines from her grandfather’s boat, or rather the boat in which her grandfather had a single share; many a time he had helped to shorten her daily task of mussel-scaling. Of late Bab had not accepted his help, but this had not greatly distressed him. The meaning of her refusal might not be so untoward as, on the surface



of it, it seemed to be. And Bab quite understood. Long ago she had discerned the patience in the man, his faithfulness, his power of loving and suffering in silence; and long ago, at least it seemed long to her now, she had desired to say something that should relieve her own soul from the burden of seeming to encourage attentions she might never accept as they were meant to be accepted.

She knew now that it was not love that was in her heart when she thought of David Andoe, and by consequence his love for her was as a weight that she was fain to put away. Here at last was an opportunity.

‘Can’t thee say a word, Bab? David had pled in the gentle, humble tones of true lovingness.

‘I’m feared I’ve nought to say ’at you’d care to hear,’ Bab replied quietly, and as she spoke a light yet chill breeze came up from the sea, making a stir that seemed to cover a little the nakedness of speech. ‘I’m noän thinkin’ o’ changin’! nut i’ noä waäy. I’d never leave the childer, still less could I leave my gran’father. Noä, I’ll never change.’

‘Ah’d niver ask thee to change,’ David made haste to reply. ‘Ah’ve thowt it all oot lang sen; an’ Ah can see no reason why we shouldn’t take a place—a bit bigger nor this—such a one as Storrs’ ’ud do right well. An’ we’d all live together; an’ the most o’ the work ’ud fall on me, an’ Ah’d be as happy as the day’s long. An’ surely there’ll be a chaänge by-an’-by,’ the poor fellow urged, half-forgetful of the prophecy he had uttered but five minutes before. ‘Either the fish ’ll be easier to come by, or the prices ’ll be better, or something ’ll turn up i’ some way. An’ even supposin’ noä great chaänge comes at all, why we’d go on easier together nor apart. There’s nought Ah wouldn’t do for thee, Bab—noä, nought i’ the world. Ah think, indeed, Ah do think, truly, ’at Ah could never live without thee!’

‘Don’t talk i’ that way. David,’ she replied. ‘An’ try an’ forget ivery word ’at you’ve said. There’s half a dozen lasses an’ more i’ Ulvstan Bight as ’d be proud an’ glad to know ’at you cared for ’em. An’ there’s good women among ’em; more nor one ’at would make a better wife nor ever I could do wi’ four bairns an’ a gran’father to start wi’. No, don’t saäy no more, David! It ’ud be noä use. Don’t saäy no more!’

But David was hurt, and his hurt would have words.

‘Ah’ll only say this,’ he urged, his dark eyes flashing in the moonlight, ‘Ah’ll only say this—you can’t lissen to me, because you’ve thought of another i’ yer mind—another ’at’ll bring ya to misery as sure as you’re born; an’ make you bite the dust o’ the e’th as you’ve niver been brought to bite it yet. There is a good bit o’ pride in ya, Bab—pride ’at Ah’ve been proud to see, because it seemed to speak o’ the high natur’ ’at was in ya—a natur’ ’at would never let ya utter no mean word, nor do no mean thing. But yer pride ’ll



be brought low, *an' he'll do it!* Mark my word. Ah've got no other word to say.'

David Andoe turned away, stung, pained beyond endurance. There had been a certain studied impassiveness in Bab's manner, a cold discouragement that had never been there before for him. He knew nothing of the events of the day, nothing of the new elements that had come into Bab's atmosphere; but he felt the presence of change, and knew it to be full of all adverseness so far as he was concerned. The night was a sleepless one, and tinged deeply with the one great trial of his much-tried life.

## CHAPTER VII.

### THE RECTORY AT MARKET YARBURGH.

'I come from haunts of coot and hern,  
I make a sudden sally,  
And sparkle out among the fern,  
To bicker down a valley.

\* \* \* \*

'I steal by lawns and grassy plots,  
I slide by hazel covers;  
I move the sweet forget-me-nots  
That grow for happy lovers.'

TENNYSON.

THE river Yarva ceases to bicker before it comes to the old town of Market Yarburgh. It winds slowly along between banks so steep as to be almost cliff-like; yet it has four miles farther to flow before reaching the more rugged cliffs by the sea. The ruin of the ancient Priory stands on a rock at least two hundred feet above the river level; and the bridge which unites the divided town has a somewhat perilous look, seeming slender for its great height and length; but since it has stood the traffic of more prosperous times it is probably equal to anything likely to be demanded of it in the present. For Market Yarburgh has pre-eminently the air of a town that has 'seen better days.'

There are quaint coaching inns in the ancient streets; stately-looking old houses of brick and stone stand in high-walled gardens—gardens sloping to the sun for the most part. But indeed everything stands on a slope in Market Yarburgh. The streets, one and all, whether on the east side or on the west, rise at an angle of about forty-five degrees; one and all are narrow; one and all are quiet, clean, silent. Women sit on the doorsteps in the main street, with their knitting in their hands, their children about them, just as they would do in the remotest country village. Fowls peck about among the worn, rounded flint-stones; linen is stretched out across the street to dry. All is slow, dull, primitive, and prosaic.

The Rectory, a long, low, red-brick building, without one trace of architectural beauty natural to it, stood on the hill-top opposite



to the ruined Priory. The gardens about it were wide and beautiful, the orchards wide and bountiful. A large fish-pond divided the two ; rustic arbours, ancient and modern, were dotted about the grounds everywhere, with garden chairs and tables under drooping trees, placed always where you could have some glimpse of the blue distant beauty of the landscape, or some sweet, bright picture of flowers, or trees, or trailing, blossoming creepers. It was a place to make happiness itself happier ; to turn unrest into perfect calm ; to help to soothe any trouble ; uplift the gloom from any hour of sorrow ; upraise the mind and heart in almost any moment of heaviness, or lowness, or inaptness for pleasures pure and true. To a man like Canon Godfrey it was a veritable 'earthly paradise,' a place to be grateful for at all times, to look upon with an especial gratitude in hours of discouragement or self-depreciation. And many such hours were known to the Canon, as they are to all souls that are pure and true, and live by aspiration.

He was a man of influence—an influence which had spread beyond his own immediate neighbourhood. Though he was, comparatively speaking, a young man, that is considering the dignity of the position he had arrived at in the Church, people came to him from afar with troubles, difficulties, perplexities, spiritual and temporal, and few went away but went with lighter heart or clearer brain, though now and then one went with heavier conscience than before. Canon Godfrey was a man who had no tenderness for sin, no sympathy with continuance in wrong-doing. Expediency was a word he did not understand.

'You had only to see his face once to perceive the bravery written there. The broad, unfurrowed brow had yet a stamp of vigorous resolution ; the mouth, half hidden by a short moustache, and the square chin, were visibly marked by strength and determination. And yet the face was not hard—the reverse of that. The kind, blue eyes alone would have redeemed it from any suspicion of hardness or harshness. And now and then a singular expression would pass over the handsome countenance, an indefinable something that seemed not only to win your admiration for the man, but your love, and even your compassion. Had some great sorrow left its touch there ? or was the passing claim upon your pathos prophetic of sorrow to come ?

As it has been said, it was only now and then that this sadder expression was upon his face. His usual look was one of extreme openness, of gladness and brightness subdued by the never-failing consciousness that his life was being lived in the presence of that life's Giver. In his merriest and most light-hearted moments—and they were not few—that look was in the thoughtful blue eyes—the look that told of recollectedness.

The consultation between the Canon and his wife as to whether or no Thorhilda should be allowed to go over to Garlaff Grange on a mission of remonstrance to her brother Hartas, was a prolonged one, and included side questions of some importance.



‘What, precisely, does Thorda wish to do?’ the Canon asked. He was sitting by the broad window-sill of his study, leaning his head upon his hand in thoughtfulness. ‘What is she thinking, or fearing?’

‘She is fearing that one of two things will happen,’ replied Mrs. Godfrey, speaking with graver face and voice than usual. ‘Either that Hartas will marry Barbara Burdas, or that he will trifle with her—win her affection, and then leave her to her misery. Thorhilda hopes to be able to persuade him to break off the——well, let us say the acquaintanceship, at once.’

‘Does she think that Hartas really cares for the girl?’

‘She is persuaded that he cares intensely; that is the difficulty. All her hope lies in the idea that Barbara does not yet care greatly for him. She means to try to influence them both.’

Canon Godfrey was silent for a while; but it was an eloquent silence. His wife knew that he was thinking deeply.

‘I am not sure that I should consider Hartas’s marriage to Barbara Burdas such a great calamity,’ he said presently.

‘*My dear Hugh!*’ exclaimed his wife. Her astonishment precluded further speech.

‘Think of it!’ said the Canon gravely. ‘You would never wish him to remain unmarried—that would round his chances of ruin as few other things would do. And what kind of wife can you expect him to win? I do not forget that I am speaking of your nephew; and I speak precisely as I should of any relation of my own—you know that, Milicent; and therefore I can ask you to think seriously of his utter want of culture, of his idleness, his rough manner; and last, but not least, of his utter pennilessness. He is Squire Theyn’s son, I grant you; but what woman, in what the world would call his own rank of life, would marry him? It may seem a hard saying, but, so far as I can perceive, it would not be at all a bad thing that he should marry a woman of the working class. His very surroundings would then impel him to work himself; he would be happier, stronger, and he would be a better and more respectable member of society. . . . But these are extempore thoughts, my dear Milicent. Therefore don’t let them disturb you.’

‘You will not mention them to Thorhilda yet awhile?’

‘Certainly not. I shall expect her to do all she can to avert the threatened catastrophe. There are many other things to be said. Society is so constituted nowadays that it would not be at all needful for Hartas to make such a violent descent in the social scale. I could name half a dozen good girls in the neighbourhood more suitable than Bab Burdas. There are the three daughters of Stephens, at the saw-mills, then there is Annie Prior, and there are Grace and Agnes Young. No; he need not go to the limpet-rocks for a wife. Still I have, and always have had, a high opinion of Barbara Burdas. There is more in her than meets the eye at the



first moment, and beyond all doubt she is attractive, strongly and strikingly attractive. It is in Hartas's favour that he should be drawn to admire a woman of such force of character.'

'Yet you would hardly wish to call her your niece?'

The Canon saw that his wife was moved to a greater extent than she wished to betray. Her face was flushed, her lips slightly tremulous. The moment was a weighty one to both.

'I should not,' the Canon replied; 'but I half suspect myself in making the admission. I am no Radical, as you know, but a staunch and loyal Conservative, with a firm belief in the fact that social differences—differences of wealth, rank, and position—are part of a divinely-ordered plan. *It is childish to suppose otherwise*—childish and unscriptural. The roots of all such differences are innate, and not to be done away by any merely human legislation. The foolish people who suppose that the nationalisation of the land, the dispersion of capital, the equalization of wealth would change the order of things permanently, must be strangely incapable of looking beyond to-morrow. Put all humanity on one level—so far as the possession of wealth is concerned—this afternoon, and by this day week we should find ourselves more widely separated than ever before. Yet, do not mistake me, do not suppose that I am satisfied with things as they are; do not for one moment imagine that I can look upon, or think upon, the poor of the land, the poor at our very gate, and not be filled with compunction, nay, with remorse. I have thought much of these things of late; I hope to think much more; and I cannot tell whither I may be led and guided. All my prayer is that I may have strength to obey whatever light may be given me. I feel strongly that I am on the verge of some spiritual and human crisis; and it is thought of, and knowledge of, the condition of the poor of England that have led me to this critical verge. I cannot speak now of my thought, of my aim, of my aspiration; I cannot tell you now how I yearn to be instrumental, were it but ever so slightly, in bringing about a better order of things, a reconciliation of ideas, a union of hopes, an amelioration of the actual present condition of "poor humanity." But you will understand that I cannot look with quite your horror upon the thing you are dreading. I have said that I have no desire to call Barbara Burdas my niece, yet I trust that I should exhibit no unmanly or unchristian pride if I were called upon to acknowledge the relationship. My ideas want readjusting.'

'If yours need readjustment, what must other people's need?'

'I cannot tell—I cannot tell! And I am, in a certain sense, responsible for so many people's ideas. The thought is appalling. It comes to me in the night when I wake, and I grow hot with the sudden pressure of conscience; and then the weight of dread chills me and I sleep. Is it typical—the night's programme? Can it be? I pray that it may not! Come what may, I trust that my soul will never sleep, nor words of mine lull any other soul to sleep. . . . I



am always glad to see that Thorda's conscience is quick enough with regard to her own people.'

'Quick enough! I fear it is only too quick,' replied Mrs. Godfrey with enthusiasm. 'If you had seen her face yesterday morning you would not think it needful to harrow her feelings about such a worthless weed as her brother Hartas.'

'Milicent! That is not like you!'

'I know it is not. Forgive me! But when I think of the way in which he has received your most kindly advice and persuasion—to say nothing of my own—and when I remember his lifelong laziness, his insolence, his utter and wilful ignorance, I feel all that is wicked within me stirred to the last dregs. . . . And, oh me! I fear that Rhoda is but very little better.'

'You are not alone in that fear, Milicent. And every now and then there comes across me a sharp pang—have we, after all, striven to the uttermost? One can never know!'

'You can never know, Hugh dear; because you are never satisfied with yourself—do what you may. Think of the manner in which you strove with Rhoda for weeks together after the long illness that she had, three years ago; and when her very life had been despaired of! How you talked to her, and besought her, and prayed with her, and for her, even when she was answering your every word with a sneer. Oh, don't speak of *your* not having done enough. Surely there is a limit to human effort!'

'Ah! but who shall dare to fix it? Not any human being. Think of the long-sufferance one almost expects from God Himself! Think of His exclaiming, by the mouth of His prophet Amos, "*Behold, I am pressed under you as a cart is pressed that is full of sheaves!*" What human experience can be named by the side of that? Oh! don't let us talk of having done enough; rather let us begin again at the beginning, and strengthen one's effort as one perceives greater need for effort. Let Thorda go this afternoon by all means. Her very calmness, her simple, natural elevation, may do more than words can do. Certainly, let her go; let her have such satisfaction as may come from the knowledge that "she has done what she could."'

## CHAPTER VIII.

### AT GARLAFF GRANGE.

'A piteous lot it were to flee from man,  
Yet not rejoice in Nature.'

WORDSWORTH.

THE Grange stood in a deep hollow, surrounded by green folding hills. The sloping fields were each one bordered by hedges of hawthorn, tall straggling hedges with crisp emerald foliage, and



scented flowers of creamy white embossing every spray. There were still cattle in the pastures, but they were few and ill-favoured. There were sheep and young lambs, but not of the breed that had once been the pride and boast of Garlaff Grange. In the hill-side paddock at the back of the house, the ancient hack on which the Squire now and then rode to market was grazing at his ease. The garden was shut in by gray stone walls, high and massive, and of quaint style. Below, a road wound round to half a dozen labourers' cottages, which stood at the back of the Grange, half buried among pear and cherry and apple trees. Sweet briar bushes, mingled with crisp gooseberries, pushed their way through the dilapidated palings, currants shot upward and waved about with the airy lightness of spirit common to unproductive men and things everywhere. The stables were near the cottages, the unsavoury refuse heaps stood in front, and made debatable land for fowls and pigs. Down there in the hollow all was so sunny, so warm, so picturesque, so luxuriant, that a sense of drowsiness seemed the natural and inevitable influence of the place. Thorhilda, stepping from the carriage, seemed certainly as if she stepped into some Lotus Land wherein it was 'always afternoon.'

There was an ancient archway in the wall, filled by a big old oaken door, and then a long pathway under meeting lilacs and laburnums. There were some snowy guelder-roses on either hand, and the rosy mauve of rhododendrons. The broad steps up to the house were moss-grown, the bent and broken railing of wrought iron was half covered by the young green of climbing rose-trees. A scarlet japonica hung from the wall between the low stone mullioned windows, needing sorely a little kindly pruning and training. This air of neglect was upon everything, upon the panes of the leaded windows upon the steep red-tiled roof, under the eaves where long spires of grass waved in the wooden spouting, stopping the flowing of the rain. The nests of familiar swallows clung to the wall, pigeons cooed upon the roof. All was still, and sad, and sweet, and melancholy.

Though it was the middle of the afternoon, the Squire was there by the fireside of the big untidy dining-room. His long clay pipe was in his hand, his tankard of ale before him. His whole air and appearance was that of a man defiant of all opinion, careless of all regard, hopeless of any good, present or future.

That he had once been a man with some claim to be considered fine-looking you saw at a glance, and indeed there was still something in the expression of his face, especially when the deep-gray eyes were lifted to yours suddenly and seriously, that awoke in you a kind of wonder, mingled with compassion. It was an expression that told you that, whatever the present, the past had not been wholly bounded by poverty, inner or outer, by mental lowness, by physical carelessness. His dress was characteristic. The black velveteen coat was not new, nor had it been well preserved, and



yet it had an air of its own, an air that neither dust nor dirt could quite destroy ; and the corduroy knee-breeches were not of the kind worn by the Squire's stable-boy. The finishing touch to his costume was given by a low, wide-brimmed, gray felt hat, which he had not removed when he sat down to his one o'clock dinner. Though his dead wife's sister, Miss Averil Chalgrove, and Rhoda, his younger daughter, had dined at the same table, their presence had not moved him to any courtesy. Miss Chalgrove had ceased to expect it long ago, and Rhoda, never having known her father to be guilty of weakness of that kind, would have been surprised to discern any sign of charge. She had no wish for such change. Things would be very well as they were if only money were not so scarce at the Grange. Very naturally Rhoda craved for more life, more movement, more pleasure, and it may be that the denial of these and other needs had done more to warp a nature not naturally good or lovable than any about her could perceive. No one professed to understand Squire Theyn's youngest daughter.

Rhoda was there in the room, and Hartas. Miss Chalgrove had gone 'to lie down,' as her custom was always in the afternoon. How else could she keep that look of youthfulness upon which she prided herself so greatly ? It was haste, and impetuosity, and over-anxiety that destroyed the looks of nine women out of ten, so she averred, with an emphasis unsuited to the theory she was maintaining. And she added always an expression of her opinion that Garlaff Grange was no fitting home for one so sensitive to roughness, to unrefinement, to unorthodox ways of living as herself. It never had been, but no alternative had been open to her. These facts she dwelt upon in a manner that might have done something toward destroying the harmony of any other household. At the Grange, unhappily, there was no harmony to be destroyed.

They had heard the carriage, this strange trio, and Rhoda had gone to the window as quickly as the movements of her ungainly figure would permit. As she seated herself again she said in a tone of sullen disappointment :

'Nobbut the Princess !'

No one rose when Thorhilda opened for herself the door of the wide, gray, slovenly-looking room. She was smiling pleasantly, trying to look genial, as she glanced from one unsmiling, irresponsive face to another ; saying in her lightest and cheeriest tone :

'Good-morning, father ! good-morning, all of you ! What a glorious day it is ! Surely Aunt Averil could not make up her mind to go and lie down to-day ! I thought that perhaps she and you would have gone for a little drive, Rhoda, while I am here . . . . Would you like to go ?'

'Naäy,—Ah care nowt aboot it,' said Rhoda slowly and sullenly, after a somewhat irritating period of hesitation. She was not in the habit of speaking broad Yorkshire except to the Rectory party. By that subtle instinct which such people always seem to possess



in perfection, she knew that her use of the dialect in its coarsest form gave annoyance.

But Thorhilda was not to be easily annoyed to-day.

'Then I will have the carriage put up, if I may,' she said, as pleasantly as if no refusal of a kind offer had had to be encountered. 'And perhaps you will give me a cup of tea presently. Hartas, will you please tell Woodward to come round for me at five?—or no, say half-past; that will give me a little longer time.'

Hartas rose slowly, and went out, his pipe still in his mouth, his hands in his pockets; a look of strange indocile determination upon his unformed features.

'Forewarned's forearmed!' he said to himself half audibly as he went down under the white and purple lilac trees to the front gate to give the message. The two men on the box of the carriage listened, touched their hats respectfully, and turned away, the older man half sorry for Miss Theyn, whom he had known and liked greatly from her earliest childhood. The younger man was somewhat scornful under his outer respectfulness, and contemptuous of Miss Theyn's brother.

Hartas was less imperceptive, less indifferent than he appeared to be; and his perception did not tend to modify the feeling with which he turned to meet his elder sister, who was coming down the steps, smiling kindly, yet half sadly, and looking into his face with a beseeching, winning look that would have won any other man's favour in spite of himself.

'Let us go into the orchard, Hartas,' she said, making a movement as if she would put her hand within his arm, but this he evaded skilfully. It was much that he consented to follow her through the narrow door that was all overhung with white blossom and green waving sprays. He was in no mood to bear expostulation.

'Might as well have it over though,' he said to himself. 'An' the sooner the better. But they must'n think, none of 'em, 'at they're goin' to come between me an' Barbara Burdas.'

## CHAPTER IX.

### 'LOVE'S NOBILITY.'

'Man was made of social earth,  
Child and brother from his birth,  
Fettered by the lightest cord  
Of blood thro' veins of kindness poured.  
Next his heart the fireside band  
Of mother, father, children stand;  
Names from awful childhood heard,  
Throbs of a wild religion stirred.'

EMERSON.

CURIOSLY enough, it was Hartas who opened the conversation, rather to Thorhilda's relief. It was not so easy to her to go



straight to the heart of this delicate matter as it had appeared to be beforehand ; and, in the moment of silence that followed their entrance into the orchard, it seemed to Miss Theyn that she had never before so clearly recognised the strangeness that was between her brother and herself, the absence of all fraternal feeling on his part, the presence of non-sisterly diffidence and trepidation on her own. But, as was usual with her in such crises, she made a strong mental effort to regain her natural standpoint ; and the effort was successful. She listened quite calmly to Hartas’s opening speech.

‘Time’s not o’ much vally to me,’ he began, taking his pipe from his mouth with evident reluctance. ‘Therefore I can’t say ’at I don’t want to waste it. An’ as for words, well, I’ve no special talent i’ that direction ; as no doubt you’ve found out afore to-day. Still, I don’t want to spend neither words nor time upon the subject you’ve come here to talk about. It won’t do no good, you see, not the least. If Barbara Burdas would but listen to me, an’ the law o’ the land allowed, I’d marry her to-night. I’d not wait for to-morrow.’

Real earnestness is always impressive, and is as the ‘heat which sets our human atoms spinning’ in the direction the one in earnest would have us travel. The fervour of a true affection is seldom to be altogether ignored, even by the coldest.

‘How long have you cared for her so much ?’ Miss Theyn asked in a gentle and sympathetic way. And her very voice, the affectionate unexpected kindness of it, touched Hartas as no remonstrance could have done. All unaware he was already betrayed.

‘How long ? All my life, or so it seems to me now,’ he replied, ‘or mebbe I’d better say, all *her* life. Why, it only seems like yesterday ’at she was a little hard-working thing of twelve or fourteen ; bright, an’ bonny, an’ full o’ mischief, yet as disdainful as the highest lady o’ the land. An’ then somehow, all at once it seemed, she came to be eighteen ; and——’

‘Eighteen !’ interposed Thorhilda in amazement. ‘I should have said she was at least eight-and-twenty !’

‘She looks more like that,’ Hartas admitted somewhat sadly. ‘But think of the life she’s lived for the last six years ! Mebbe you don’t know nought about it ; an’ couldn’t understand if you did ; but *I* know. I’ve watched her all along when she little thought of it ; an’ many a time the sight’s been bad anuff to bear, I can tell you.’

‘What made you think of her first ?’ Thorhilda asked, still speaking in a tone that told of more than mere kindly interest.

‘First of all ! That I can hardly say,’ Hartas replied with softened voice, and a decided increase of confidingness in his manner. ‘I remember when she was a little thing. (I’m ten years older than she is—ten all but three months.) An’ I always noticed her when I was down at the Bight. She was so different from the rest somehow, so superior, an’ yet so winnin’ ; an’ they



all seemed to know it, an' to give in when she was by. . . . An then that awful storm came ; an' I was down on the cliff-top that mornin'. Oh ! I'll never forget it !

'Was that the day her father was drowned ?'

'Her father and her mother. . . . But you can't have forgot ! Why, the whole land rang wi' the stories o' that gale for weeks after !'

'There have been so many gales,' replied Thorhilda deprecatingly. 'And I was younger then ; and perhaps less sympathizing. But I do remember something of the loss of the *North Star*. . . . Wasn't that the name of the boat that suffered here ?'

'It was the name o' one of the boats 'at was wrecked in Ulvstan Bight that mornin', but it was not the name o' the one 'at belonged mostly to Ephraim Burdas. She was called the *Seamew*. An' a fine boat she was, for her size. I remember her well. Old Ephraim had only pointed her out to me about a week before, telling me how she was the fulfilment of all his hopes, the result of all his long life's toil. She'd cost him over four hundred pounds altogether ; an' she was every plank his own save one-eighth part, the single share that Jim Tyas had bought. An' 'twas old Ephraim 'at sailed her ; the others never seemed right when the old man wasn't at the helm. An' he'd taken his usual place that night ; never dreamin o' nought happenin' out o' the common. All 'at ever he remembered after was 'at his son, Bab's father, had seemed out o' spirits ; an' had never spoken to nobody after they went out o' the Bight till the storm burst upon 'em all of a sudden. 'Twas him 'at first saw it comin', in fact. But you should hear old Ephraim tell the tale.'

I would rather hear it from you ; only make it brief ; and not too sad. . . . How many were there in the boat altogether ?

'Only four. As I said, the old man was in the stern ; an' they'd shot the lines some nine or ten miles off the land. Then they'd sat down to rest for awhile ; an' to pass the darkest time o' the night. 'Twas a fair sort o' mornin' ; fine, an' light, an' calm ; but about four o'clock, as old Ephraim were leanin' again the side o' the boat, his head upon his hand, half asleep, all of a sudden he heard his son shoutin' :

“*By heav'n, there's a storm upon us ! Yonder's a ship flyin' afore the gale, wi' her sails all torn to rags an' ribbons !*”

'The old man couldn't believe it ; but he jumped up, an' looked out seaward ; an' sure anuff, 'twas as young Ephraim had said. There wasn't a second to be lost. They tried to head the boat for the nearest land—it happened to be Yarva Wyke ; but long afore they could reach it the gale broke up the sea ; an' Jim Tyas wasn't at all for landin' there. Jim was a chap 'at was allus desperate feared in a storm, so old Ephraim told me ; an' he said he'd never seen the man so feared as he was that mornin' when the hurricane was fairly upon 'em. They down with the sail afore they touched



the sea-break; but there seemed no chance for ‘em; an’ afore they’d been tossing upon the edge o’ the breakers many minutes a great wave struck the boat, an’ knocked the side completely out of her. It appeared to be all over then. Jim cried out, “*Lord ha’ mercy upon my wicked soul this day!*” an’ as old Ephraim said, it almost seemed as if Providence had heard him, for the strangest thing happened ‘at ever the old man had seen in all his long life. The sea broke away right in front of them in the curiousest manner, an’ stood up like walls on either hand; an’ they were driven through between as fast as they could go. But the boat was breakin’ to bits under ‘em every minute; an’ at last they were all four tossin’ i’ that awful sea.

‘They could all of ‘em swim, better or worse, an’ they all reached the rocks, but ‘twere in a bad place. The cliff’s like a house-end just there; an’ though a dozen or more people had gathered on the top of it, they’d neither rope nor ladder; an’ the worst of it was young Ephraim’s wife was there, Bab’s mother, an’ she’d three little children clingin’ to her gown; an’ a four-weeks old baby at her breast; an’ she weren’t well—hadn’t never been since the child was born. An’ when she saw the boat’s crew just below, clingin’ to one another on the narrow ledge under the cliff, the straight wall of rock behind ‘em, an’ the rising tide beating upon ‘em more furiously every moment, ‘twere more than she could bear. Breakin’ away fra the little ones all of a sudden, she sprang from the top o’ the rock wi’ her new-born baby in her arms; an’ almost as she struck the water her husband dashed in again after her; an’ folks has told me since ‘at it was all they could do to keep Bab from makin’ a fourth. Nobody could help the three ‘at was strugglin’ there. They went down, within half a dozen yards o’ dry land. An’ the curiousest part of it all was that little Ailsie washed up, not only alive, but seeming none so much the worse. I helped to catch hold of her, and to give her to Bab. An’ that’s why Bab cares for her so much, an’ can hardly bear to let the little thing out of her sight. . . . Bab was only twelve years old when it all happened; but if she’d been twice twelve she couldn’t have been a better mother to the three small lads an’ the little girl. But it’s no use talkin’. Such as you can never see the good in such a woman as Barbara Burdas. She can’t play the piano. I doubt much whether she’s ever either heard one, or seen one. An’ pickin’ flithers for the fishermen of Ulvstan Bight isn’t quite such a refined way o’ spendin’ time as makin’ wax-flowers, or crochy antimacassars. No; Bab isn’t refined wi’ what you an’ most others such as you would call refinement—not what you’d call a “lady.” But no lady ‘at I’ve ever seen, or ever can see, would lift me out o’ the mire as Barbara Burdas could do, if she cared to think about me at all; an’ there isn’t another woman in the world, ‘at I know of, ‘at understands what unselfishness means as *she* understands it; not another nowhere ‘at lives a life so totally self-sacrificin’. An’ the best of it is she doesn’t never dream ‘at she’s doin’ aught but what she’s



bound to do. You couldn't open her eyes, if you tried, to the meanin' o' self an' self-interest. . . . But I said I didn't want to waste no time on this subject, an' here I am, wastin' a whole quarter of an hour.'

'Don't regret it,' Thorhilda replied, using the brevity that comes of over-fulness of new thought. Hartas's vividly told story, the graphic touches of it, the intense reality, had impressed his sister greatly. And that in communicating to her his knowledge of Barbara Burdas and her life he should at the same time have betrayed much that was new, and not unfavourable, of himself, was a fact demanding consideration.

'I am glad to hear all this from *you*, Hartas,' she continued. 'I am pleased that you should talk to me about Barbara Burdas.'

'An' you'll be glad if I'll lissen to what you've got to say in return,' the young man broke in with some impetuosity. 'But remember what I said at the beginning. I mean to make her my wife if she will but consent—consent on any terms.'

'And if she will not?'

'If she won't, I don't care what becomes of me.'

'I don't want to preach to you, Hartas,' Thorhilda replied with some natural diffidence, 'but is that altogether a manly mood in which to meet one of the greatest crises that can happen in your lifetime?'

'Manly? Mebbe not. But I reckon 'at you don't know much o' what such a disappointment 'ud mean to me—if it came to that. An' you an' all your set 'ud be rejoicin', as if something good had happened.'

'Can you put yourself in our place for a moment—in *my* place, for instance?' Thorhilda asked with gentle firmness. 'Can you even try to imagine what such a marriage would be to me, what it would mean to my life, were you, my only brother, to marry a—a bait-gatherer?'

'It needn't mean no more to you than the wind that blows!' Hartas replied, with his rough, ready emphasis. 'Why should you think it would? Why should we ever come near you? When have I ever come in your way, except when I couldn't help it? When have I ever asked a favour of you? When have I ever expected so much as a kind word from you, or a helpful one, when I was particularly needing it? What have I ever asked, or requested of you at all, save 'at you should go your way an' leave me to go mine?'

'You have requested nothing—that is true enough,' Thorhilda replied, involuntarily subduing her voice to the softest and gentlest contrast possible. 'But, remember, the difference between us was never created by me, nor by anyone at the Rectory. You must admit that my aunt and uncle have done what they could. And you must also admit that, though you have repulsed them time after time, they have never ceased to make fresh advances. Be generous, at least in word; as they have been in deed. . . . But,



pardon me, I am saying more than I meant to say. I do not want to irritate you—anything but that. But I felt constrained to say that all the coldness and strangeness has been your doing—not mine—not ours. It has pained me ceaselessly and infinitely. It has hurt me, and kept me from my sleep ; it has darkened many a day ; poisoned many a pleasure. . . . Hartas, do you think that I have *no* affection for you ?’

It was a singular scene. That a woman of Miss Theyn’s stateliness and loveliness, of her extreme refinement, should stand there pleading for some sign of recognition of the tie that was between herself and the man who seemed as the veriest clod by her side, was surely a touching and pathetic thing. Was Hartas feeling it to be strange ? Was he moved in any way ?—impelled to any warmth of responsiveness that he yet had no art or intellect to express ?

‘It’s a bad moment to speak o’ such a thing now,’ he said, having less of his natural harshness and brusqueness of manner than before. ‘I don’t doubt but that you may feel more like a sister to me than I ever dreamed you did ; an’ at another time I might ha’ been glad of it. But, as I said, I know what’s brought you here this afternoon ; an’ I’ve only one answer to all you have said, or can say. That answer you’ve had. I won’t anger you wi’ sayin’ it again.’

Thorhilda was silent for awhile. One thing she had to congratulate herself upon—nay, two moved her to a momentary content. She had not irritated her brother ; and she had a hopeful feeling of having opened a way that might some day lead to his heart.

‘I hope your time has not been quite wasted, Hartas,’ she replied. ‘I should certainly not consider that it has been if we might begin to realize, but ever so faintly, that we each owe something to the other—some help, some sympathy, some affection, or, at least, some friendliness of feeling. . . . Has it ever occurred to you that *I* could feel lonely ?—that *I* have no brother or sister, except in name ?’

Hartas Theyn’s face was lifted in most earnest surprise.

‘*You* lonely !’ he exclaimed. ‘No ; when I’ve thought about you at all I’ve thought that if ever anybody in this world did have all they wanted it was you.’

‘Then, ah, how you have been mistaken !’ Thorhilda replied with some emphasis. ‘Don’t imagine that I complain. I am much too conscious of the good that is mine to do that ; but my life has not been perfect in its happiness—how should it ? You little dream of what I have felt in other people’s houses—homes where there may have been a dozen, or half a dozen brothers and sisters, all kind, all loving, all happy ! Ah ! how often it has pained me to see it all—to see it from outside, as a wanderer may sit on a doorstep on a winter’s night and see the warmth and light within, which he may not feel or share ! I am not blaming you—I am blaming no one. I am merely telling you how it has been with me—how it is yet. I want you to understand how it is, even now.’

‘I don’t see that I can help matters much,’ Hartas replied, not



sullenly or indifferently, but with the perplexed absence of one absorbed in thought.

'I have thought that you might—some day,' Thorhilda said. 'I have so often thought of your marriage, so often dreamed of your wife as one who would be my sister, who would draw us together, who would make me feel that I was your sister in reality. And I have seen her in my mind many a time, a good, loving, understanding woman, with—pardon me for saying it—culture enough to be a friend to me, and love enough to bear with all short-comings in you. . . . And now, now my dream is ended. . . . What wonder that I should plead with you, entreat you, at least, to consider, to do nothing in haste!'

Perhaps it was fortunate that at that moment Rhoda came up under the white orchard trees. Her appearance might have been amusing to anyone in a mood to be amused lightly; but to Thorhilda all was distressing, from the heavy rolling gait to the untidy tweed dress, unfastened at the throat, yet displaying no finishing touch in the shape of lace or linen collar. Her pretty golden hair was huddled into a shapeless coil at the back of her head; there was a sullen expression about the large mouth, and in the greenish hazel eyes. Her voice was in keeping, being gruff, indistinct, unpleasant.

'If ya want that tea, it's ready,' she said, stopping short of her elder sister and brother by some yards.

Then she turned and rolled back again. Thorhilda sighed and followed her. The visit was over, and it had availed nothing.

'Nothing at all!' she said to herself sadly.

'Nothing, nothing at all!' she repeated to the Canon, who was walking thoughtfully up and down under the veranda at the Rectory when she returned, waiting to console her, or to rejoice with her, as occasion might require. And now, as always, his consolation was sufficiently effective.

'Be patient, Thorda dear, and don't despair,' he said, holding her hand in his warm, fatherly grasp. 'The most far-seeing of us can't see the length of the next hour, or the full meaning of this. . . . And now go and dress quickly and prettily; there are some of your favourite pale yellow pansies to wear. The Merediths will be here in twenty minutes.'

## CHAPTER X.

### 'IN ALL TIME OF OUR WEALTH.'

'Dear friend—If I were sure of thee, sure of thy capacity, sure to match my mood with thine, I should never again think of trifles in relation to thy comings and goings. . . . Thou art to me a delicious torment. Thine ever, or never.'—EMERSON.

THE dinner-party at the Rectory was quite a small one. Mrs. Meredith, handsome, correct, more affable than usual, sat at Canon Godfrey's right hand. Her son Percival was next to Miss Theyn.



Gertrude Douglas, Thorhilda's friend, had been taken in to dinner by the Rev. Marcus Egerton, the one curate of Market Yarburgh.

Gossip had been busy about the four last-mentioned names for some time ; but, as usual, the suggestions and hints that had been passed about were at least premature. Miss Theyn, as we have seen, was by no means sure even of her own wish and will, and Miss Douglas was not a likely woman to marry a poor curate. She was older than Thorhilda, taller, stronger, and perhaps equally beautiful in the eyes of some, though in quite a different way, and she was certainly more ambitious. Being the daughter of a not too successful country surgeon, she had a very natural dread of small means.

‘I must marry,’ she had said openly to Thorhilda, ‘and I must marry a rich man. I have had enough of poverty !’

‘But you would not marry anyone merely because he was rich ?’ Thorhilda had asked in unfeigned surprise.

‘I fear I should,’ Gertrude made answer, speaking half sadly and tentatively. She had no wish to shock Miss Theyn, though often she came nearer to doing so than she dreamed. ‘I fear I should,’ she had replied. ‘Market Yarburgh is not a place to afford one many chances. I am nearly thirty, and I look older than I am. . . . But don't let us talk of it at present, dear. Let us speak of *your* chances rather than of mine. There is not another Percival Meredith in the neighbourhood.’

Miss Douglas had perceived without being able quite to comprehend Miss Theyn's flush of annoyance and indignation. Not even a friend so intimate as Gertrude Douglas might speak of a matter so delicate, so immature, without offending her sense of good taste.

‘My chances !’ she exclaimed. ‘If you care for me, Gertrude, if you care for my friendship in the least, you will hardly speak so again to me. Indeed, indeed, I thought you had known me better than to speak like that !’

This had happened some time before. Gertrude had laughed most musically, most good-naturedly, and had kissed away Thorhilda's offended dignity at once. There was a peculiar fascination about Miss Douglas ; she never took offence, and she was cleverer than Thorhilda in many ways ; she had wider knowledge of the world, keener insight into certain sides of human nature ; her manner was full of charm, and her temperament most cheerful and amiable. If these good qualities had some alloy, Thorhilda was not one to dwell upon the fact. Gertrude Douglas was her friend, and perfect loyalty requires that even thought itself should be silent now and then.

Gertrude came often to the Rectory. She appreciated the pleasant little dinner-parties ; not only the varied *menu*, the delicate cookery, the careful service, but also the beautiful silver, the lovely flowers that decorated the table and the rooms in such profusion, the perfect lighting, the general air of daintiness and finish that was upon everything. Her own narrow home was sadly apt to



seem narrower after a few days in the wider rooms in the house on the hill-top ; the very carpets seemed dingier and poorer, the chairs harder, the sofas more uncomfortable ; the meals were hardly worth sitting down too. As a matter of course she kept silence as to her appreciation ; she had too much tact to speak of such matters, expect now and then to Thorhilda alone. For social life she had enough of other and brighter topics, and to-night, as usual, she gave sufficient rein to her conversational powers without seeming to display them in any undue manner. No awkward pauses might happen at any table to which Miss Douglas had been invited.

After dinner, while the two elder ladies sat chatting by the fire in the drawing-room, Thorhilda and Gertrude stood near the window in the dim twilight, the hour that so often attunes two waiting souls to helpful intercourse ; we owe more, spiritually, than we acknowledge, to the physical alternation of night and day.

The curtains by that especial west window had been left undrawn, as usual, by Thorhilda's wish. Outside the stars were burning in a clear, dark sky ; a young moon was dropping over the towers of the ruin on the opposite hill-top ; beyond the moon there was a faint, white mist overspreading the distance ; the whole scene was touched by that mystery of mingled light and darkness which makes so much of the poetry of this most poetic world. And yet the poetry is often tinged with sadness ; the sadness of all *suggested* beauty. It is in music of almost every kind ; it is not absent from any good picture ; but it is in the natural world that one feels its charm most strongly and strangely. The first morning hour when the light as it were breathes upon the east, the last evening hour, when it seems to sigh itself gently and sadly away, the calm, stirless moonlight, the soft, wondrous glowing of the winter starlight over the wide expanse of moor or of sea ; all these in their tender disclosures, their mystic reservations, move the soul to 'strange yearnings after we know not what, and awful impressions from we know not whence.' The wise man is he who seeks these finer influences frequently, and having found them, acknowledges with gratitude that it is 'good to be there.'

The two younger women were still standing silently, but Miss Douglas broke the silence so soon as she felt it.

'Thorda dear, you are not happy to-night!' she said in her round, full, musical voice, a voice difficult to soften at any time.

Thorhilda smiled, and lifted her face to her friend.

'It is odd that you should make that remark,' she replied, in tones that contrasted perfectly with those of Gertrude Douglas. 'All day, nay, for quite two days now, I have found myself thinking of happiness at every spare moment, and this by no deliberate wish or will of my own. Is it not strange?'

'Very. . . . But surely you are happy enough? What happiness you haven't yet is coming toward you as fast as it can come. No, don't turn your face away, dear ; I won't say another word. I couldn't help sitting opposite to you at dinner, you know ; neither



could I help seeing Mr. Meredith's face, or hearing his voice. There—I've done!

'Of that I'm glad. . . . But, Gertrude, you mistake me altogether. It was not only of my own happiness I was thinking, but of that of other people—of the whole human race in fact. We all want to be happy; we are, many of us, striving for it; yet surely we none of us know very exactly what happiness is!'

While Gertrude was laughing, a long, low, pleasant laugh, the Canon and the two younger men came in, and involuntarily began to smile for very sympathy with the musical sound that was coming from the window.

'Just at the right moment!' cried Miss Douglas. 'Do come here, all of you, and tell us what happiness is! Here is Thorhilda miserable because she can't make out what happiness consists of. Isn't it an idea?'

Miss Douglas had sauntered out from the recess by the window as she spoke, coming forth with that half-imperious air of conscious fascination that became her so well. And in the background of her thought, of which she was also conscious, was a curious query as to whether in the sight of—say Percival Meredith, for instance—she or Thorhilda made the most attractive picture.

They were nearly alike in height, in a certain cultured air of self-possession, but there, suddenly, all possibility of comparison ended. Their very dress told something of the radical difference of their natures. Miss Douglas's costume of amber satin and black lace, with a profusion of yellow roses, grown under the Rectory glass, was sufficiently æsthetic even for the taste of Mr. Meredith, but it did not charm him as did the soft heliotrope-tinted crape that Thorhilda was wearing with only a few pale primrose-coloured pansies and some maidenhair by way of ornament.

He felt a little proud of his superior taste. But in justice to him let it be said that it was not only the outer appearance of the woman he loved that attracted him; this by no means. He was sufficiently cultured to feel the drawing of the finer nature, the more finished delicacy. As to whether or not he might find himself in perfect agreement with a deeper soul or more aspiring spirit, was not a question likely to trouble him as yet. So far no doubt of this kind had beset him.

## CHAPTER XI.

### CONCERNING HAPPINESS.

'He could afford to suffer  
With those whom he saw suffer. Hence it came  
That in our best experience he was rich,  
And in the wisdom of our daily life.'

WORDSWORTH.

'HAPPINESS!' Percival Meredith ejaculated softly, as he drew away toward the window, turning with a self-possessed air, as of



invitation, to Thorhilda. Then lower still and more emphatically he said, 'I know what would make *my* happiness!'

But for Miss Douglas it is possible that Thorhilda's eyes had yet been so far closed as to permit of her replying to this remark as it was intended to be replied to, with some 'soft nothing' that would provide an opening for a stronger and less dubious declaration. As it was, the nothing could not be uttered at that moment. Instead, Miss Theyn said aloud :

'Uncle Hugh, what is your idea of happiness? You are the happiest man I know.'

A touch of gravity came over the Canon's face, into the blue, kindly eyes ; the smile faded from about the mouth.

'I *am* happy,' he said, 'and I am glad to acknowledge it ; but it is not an unshaded happiness. How should it be, when I fear that—taking the world about us generally—not one person in a hundred could say the same thing ! . . . As to *defining* happiness—who could give any true and generally acceptable definition of the word ? It is probable that to each human being it means some totally different thing. Not one of us could legislate for another so far as merely human happiness is concerned.'

'I should say the best definition is "having all one wants,"' Gertrude Douglas replied with her usual readiness.

'That *seems* adequate,' said the Canon. 'And yet if by that you mean the gratification of all material desires, I can only reply that I know men who have not a single desire unfulfilled, but who are yet far enough from happiness. On the other hand, I know people, ground down under what men term the heel of Fate, poor, lonely, bereaved, neglected, but yet as bright, as cheerful, as hopeful as any human being need wish to be.'

'Ah, if they have *hope*?' said Mr. Egerton, in his usual suggestive way.

'You think that is the great secret?' the Canon asked. 'And *you*, Mr. Meredith—where does your opinion lie ?'

Percival smiled languidly.

'Upon my word, I don't know that I've ever thought of it, either one way or another,' he said. 'Just now, when Miss Douglas was speaking, I felt decidedly inclined to agree with her. But I should fancy there's a good deal to be said for Egerton's idea. Why not combine the two—have everything you want, and something to hope for besides ? Then, surely, you would touch something like real felicity !'

Canon Godfrey looked at his neighbour with something that was almost curiosity, and for a few seconds he made no reply. His best and most spiritual thoughts on this topic seemed hardly suited to the present environment.

'It is probable,' he said at last, 'that a true answer to the question asked in the beginning would draw upon the deepest resources of the nature of each one of us, and it would be no bad theme for an hour's quiet meditation to try to find an answer. The queries



need only be three : I. Am I happy ? II. If not, then *why* ? III. What can I do to bring happiness somewhat nearer ?

‘Let us do it now ! and each of us write down our answer !’ exclaimed Miss Douglas in her sparkling, ready way.

But Thorhilda protested instantly.

‘Oh no, *no* !’ she cried. ‘I could not do that, not now. I could not make a game of it, *pour passer le temps* ! . . . Forgive me, Gertrude ; but I could not, I could not to-night.’

‘Oh, dear ; how terribly in earnest we are !’ exclaimed Miss Douglas, smiling—nay, laughing quite sweetly. ‘One never expects to have to take things *au sérieux* after dinner !’

‘I fear we are some of us talking great nonsense !’ interposed practical little Mrs. Meredith. She was being ignored in a way she was not accustomed to. The very set of her imposing cap upon her most abundant and artistic white hair told you that she was not a person to be overlooked. She was as full of life, of vigour, as she had always been, and the snow-white hair was as surprising as it was picturesque. In spite of it, she did not look more than forty, though her age was fifty-five ; and that her only son should already be giving himself some of the airs of a middle-aged man was not pleasing to her. The surest way for a stranger to reach her heart was to make some allusion to ‘her brother.’ ‘I fear we are talking nonsense,’ she repeated. For my part, I think happiness is very much a matter of mental habit. George Eliot admits something like that. Does she not say somewhere that “unhappiness may become a habit of mind” ? And doubtless such habits are very hard to break.’

‘There is truth in that,’ replied the Canon. ‘But surely, before sorrow can become so habitual as to be more congenial than joy, any human being must have bent to discipline both long and sore, and, in such cases, which of us, not having sounded the same depths, shall dare to judge ?’

‘Oh, but we always *do* judge one another,’ the little woman broke in with something that seemed more like hardness than flippancy in her tone. ‘We can’t help it ; and when we see people whose troubles are over, but who yet *won’t* forget them, you know we can’t help thinking they want a little more trouble to bring them to their senses . . . . Oh, don’t pretend, Canon Godfrey, you know you agree with me !’

‘I certainly won’t pretend,’ replied the Canon, smiling gravely, and putting away into the background of his mind some stern experiences of which he knew only too much. ‘No, I won’t pretend ; instead, I will add to what you have urged. I have a firm belief that a sense of happiness is a thing to be cultivated, a sense of daily and hourly gratitude for our human well-being, let the drawbacks be what they may. I fear that there are people in whom this sense is so imperfectly developed that it can hardly be said to exist at all ! . . . . Don’t you think that is true, Egerton ?’

‘Only too true !’ responded Mr. Egerton with his usual quick



appreciation, giving you an impression of a human mind all alight because of the warmth of heart not hidden within. 'Indeed, I have often fancied that we might have a new Professor—a Professor of the Art of Happiness—a man with psychological knowledge enough to do for our emotional half what the physiologist is endeavouring to do for our bodies ; a man who would go on his daily rounds to this house, or to that, as a doctor does ; finding out this woman's reason for habitual sadness, the cause of that man's gloomy despair ; who would analyse our feelings for us, put them into definite shape, and then put before us the unphilosophical view we were taking so strongly and clearly as to change the whole mental atmosphere. It might be done, surely !'

It was easy to see that Mr. Egerton had only meant to be taken half seriously. But the Canon, listening, had passed on into earnest.

'Are we not trying to do it—some of us ?' he asked. 'Trying to do just that—to minister to minds diseased wherever we may find them ? It is not easy ; how should it be ? We have high authority for believing that each heart alone knows its own bitterness, that no other heart can know it, or share it. Think of Keble, too :

“Not even the tenderest heart, and next our own,  
Knows half the reasons why we smile or sigh.”

Of course it doesn't ; how should it ? And the most closely-surrounded heart is lonelier than we know. How, then, must it be with those who, admittedly, have not a single soul to whom they can unburden themselves for an hour ? It is cases like these one is glad to find out, to help, not heeding the difficulties. If one may not create happiness, one may, at least now and then, alleviate unhappiness. And that is not a little ; no, it is certainly not a little in the sight of Him who said, "*Inasmuch as ye did it unto one of the least of these, ye did it unto Me.*"

'Won't you give us a sermon on happiness some Sunday, Uncle Hugh ?' Thorhilda asked gravely.

'Certainly I will, or else a lecture in the schoolroom some Wednesday evening. The latter will be better ; even on your own showing, my dear ! It is not so long since you admitted that sermons were difficult things to listen to.'

'So they are *to me* !' Miss Theyn admitted, preparatory to asking yet another leading question on the topic just begun. But before the question could be put into suitable and sufficiently earnest words, Gertrude Douglas had changed the subject altogether. It was a way she had. For all her tact she knew little of the decaying art of conversation.

And for Percival Meredith, too, the evening was spoiled, that is, so far as his one intention was concerned. It yet remained to him to ask formally for an interview on the morrow, and though he thought seriously on this, he put the idea away rather impatiently at last. It seemed to belong to a past day ; and Percival was anxious, beyond even his natural years, to keep pace with the



present. The fact that he was so much older than Miss Theyn had more than its due weight with him. The difference would have been as nothing to a man who had not, in some way, passed the 'slow feet' of the years.

And yet his mood that night was by no means a sad one. He sat alone in his smoking-room for some time, half wishing that he had asked Mr. Egerton to come over to Ormston for a few days, and half glad that he had not.

'Still,' he said to himself, 'when one is in a state of perplexity or suspense, solitude is seldom quite welcome.' Then he chose for himself a good cigar, and poked the fire into a blaze, and put up the Berlin slippers which his mother had worked with such extreme care to be thoroughly toasted. 'And yet, why *should* I be perplexed?' he said to himself when these arrangements for his personal comfort had been made to his satisfaction. 'I know what I wish to do, and what I mean to do; then why perplexity? . . . And as for suspense?' . . . and here Mr. Meredith took his cigar from between his lips and smiled satirically. 'Suspense! with a lady so dainty and so shy, waiting in her utmost daintiness and shyness for one to throw the handkerchief. Well, it is certainly not—not altogether unpleasant! One might—at Market Yarbrough—bide one's time, and make a successful throw after all! That is one advantage of a country place. . . . And there are others—several others! . . . At the present moment I am in love with Ormston Magna.'

## CHAPTER XII.

### IN THE VILLAGE STREET.

'Can another be so blessed, and we so pure, that we we can offer him tenderness? When a man becomes dear to me I have touched the goal of fortune.'—EMERSON.

THEY were roses, lovely fresh roses that filled Miss Theyn's hands. She was alone in the carriage as it drove down one of the narrow streets of Ulvstan—streets where greengrocers lived, and pastry-cooks, and vendors of bathing garments. Thorhilda had no purchases to make, and the roses were intended for the matron of the small cottage hospital which the Canon had done so much towards instituting, and now maintained almost solely by his own generosity. But the roses never reached Mrs. Nesbitt. A tall figure, bearing a basket covered with seaweed, suddenly turned the corner of the street—a blue worsted-clad figure, with no bonnet to hide the coils of her beautiful chestnut hair, no hat to shade the finely-cut features upon which the cast of thought was already marked so plainly. Miss Theyn saw the girl, recognised her, and stopped the carriage instantly. A moment's reflection might perhaps have changed her feeling, but that moment was not possible. Thorhilda was acting and speaking out of her first impulse.

'Barbara,' she cried, holding out the big bouquet of lovely roses,



red, creamy-white, deep crimson, and palest blush. 'Barbara! will you have these? They are quite fresh. And how is your grandfather? My uncle fancied he was not looking quite so well as usual at church on Sunday morning.'

The tide of rich colour that was pouring over Bab's face, under her hair, down her neck, attested the confusion to which she was moved by the suddenness of the encounter; but no muscle of her beautiful, regular features was tortured to express her emotion. The girl lifted her gray-blue eyes—there was no sauciness in them now, no defiance; there was nothing but a deep and deferential admiration—nay, it was more, affection, devotion, as Miss Theyn saw. And the girl stood like a statue for calmness and for dignity, taking the bouquet—such a one as she had never saw before—and, apart from the fact that Miss Theyn had given it to her, the roses were in themselves as precious as any pearls or diamonds Bab's limited experience enabled her to imagine. The blushes continued to grow upon the fine face, but Bab was not speechless.

'You mean them for me?' she said, using a soft, grave surprise that was as touching as it was welcome. Her eyes were drooping over the flowers, her lips a little tremulous with the weight of pleasure.

'How will I thank you, Miss Theyn?' she added. 'How will I ever thank you? An' there's nothing I can do, nothing!'

'You hardly need to thank me, not for a few flowers,' Miss Theyn replied; and it was easy to see that she was receiving almost as much pleasure as she was giving. 'Do you care for them so much? I am glad of that. I can bring you some often, almost every time we come into Ulvstan.'

'Oh, don't think of that, Miss Theyn,' Bab replied, her independence taking quick alarm at the idea of a pleasure so spontaneous being converted into a benefit 'to be continued.' 'Don't think of that,' she said; 'I'll never forget as you've given me these.'

Thorhilda was quick to understand.

'Very well!' she said, with one of her usual winning smiles. 'I think I know what you feel, and I will respect it. All the same, I may come and see you, I hope? I have been promising myself that pleasure.'

The blush on Barbara's face deepened; and since the words she could have said—words of gratitude for even the hope of some crumbs of affection—since these might not be spoken, she had few others, and these were not adequate.

'I'd like to see you,' she said, lifting her truthful eyes to Miss Theyn's face; 'I'd like to see you often—every day of my life if it might be. But——'

Bab hesitated here, and looked somewhat embarrassed; and while she was silent a probable cause for her sudden hesitation crossed Miss Theyn's mind.

'You are not afraid that I might try to influence you against



your wish, are you Barbara?' she asked. 'Are you thinking, for instance, that I may try to persuade you to discountenance my brother? Is it that?'

Barbara lifted her straightforward, unsuspicious face, and some pain was written there, some surprise.

'No,' she said, 'I was not thinking o' that, not then. But since you have spoke of it of yoursel', Miss Theyn, would you mind sayin' more—all you think, indeed?'

'All that I think on the matter,' Thorhilda said earnestly; 'that would be difficult. Still, I should like you to know the truth. . . . Let us speak exactly. I went over to the Grange one day on purpose to speak to my brother about you; it was the day after I had seen you on the beach. I went to talk to him about his intercourse with you, to ask him his wishes and intentions, to beg him to consider seriously what he was doing. But afterward when I came away, and was trying to remember what I had said, I was surprised to find that I had said so little of all that I had meant to say. . . . Life is seldom cut and squared to one's anticipations. Some new experience, giving rise to some new feeling, does away with all the old conclusions, and one is left perplexed.'

Bab was listening, fully understanding, and Miss Theyn knew that she understood. Half unaware, an opinion as to Bab's quick and strong intellectual capacity was growing within her with every turn of the conversation. It was not what the girl said, but what the expression of her face said for her.

'Let us speak exactly, you said just now, Miss Theyn;' and Bab's repetition of the phrase, her very intonation of it, might have been amusing at another time. 'Let us speak exactly, you say. Well, then, you did wish to persuade your brother from thinkin' o' me. You went to the Grange on purpose?'

'Yes,' Miss Theyn replied, sorry for the sudden sorrow she saw in Barbara's eyes and about the finely-curved, sensitive mouth. Barbara remained quite silent.

'I did go on that errand,' Miss Theyn repeated. 'But I must tell you all; I must tell you that I found my brother's mind so completely made up that no influence of mine availed to move him from his purpose for a second. . . . We are a stubborn race, we of Garlaff, and we seldom change.'

'Then you failed of your erran'! Bab asked quietly.

'Yes; utterly.'

'An' you were sorry?'

'How shall I reply to that, Barbara? I wish to tell the truth, and I do not wish to pain you.'

'And the truth is——'

'The truth is simply this,' interrupted Miss Theyn, not liking to see any longer the sad, heart-hungry look on Bab's face—it was like watching the going down of some emotional thermometer, marking the degrees of lowering disappointment. 'The truth is this, that I do not at present understand myself, my own feeling in



the matter. . . I suppose I had some regret ; I suppose I did feel some annoyance at my brother's strong determination.'

'Thank you, Miss Theyn,' Barbara said very calmly. 'I knew you'd speak plain, an' I'm glad you spoke to-day. . . . An' thank you again for the roses. 'Twas good of you, an' kind, to give them to me.'

Barbara's face had grown paler as she turned away ; her look was grave to dignity, and her bow graceful enough for any lady in the land. Thorhilda bowed and smiled, then gave a word to the coachman, who was glad that his impatient horses should at last be delivered from that long stay in the village street. 'Home,' Miss Theyn said, throwing herself back among the rugs and cushions, and yielding herself up to feelings of mingled dissatisfaction and self-reproach. In wishing to be perfectly truthful, had she gone beyond the truth ? Had she been quite careful enough of the evidently too-sensitive feelings of another ? Barbara Burdas had touched her, appealed to the yet but half-awakened sense of humanity that was struggling for existence within her, and she could not put away the appeal.

'I wish I had said a word more—but one word !' she exclaimed half audibly. 'Perhaps I may say it yet—I must. That sad look of Barbara's will certainly haunt me so long as it is unsaid !'

## CHAPTER XIII.

### EXTENUATING CIRCUMSTANCES.

'Well you may, you must, set down to me,  
Love that was life,—life that was love.'

ROBERT BROWNING.

WAS it a little unfortunate that Hartas should take it into his head to go down to Ulvstan that same evening ? He had not seen Barbara for some days ; he was feeling lonely and unhappy, and also unhopeful ; and the unexpected darkness and chilliness of the summer night helped his feeling of depression. And he soon discerned that Bab was not likely to put it away that evening. He recognised at once that she was in some highly-wrought mood not to be accounted for by failure or success in gathering her tale of limpets.

He had been waiting patiently below the little wooden gallery for some time when Bab appeared. He knew her ways. She would come out to the spring by the corner of the house for water, or to close the old green window shutters, or to stand and look at the sky and breathe the fresh sea-air for a few minutes, as was her wont during the indoor evenings she bore so badly. Hartas did not dare, now or ever, to do anything but wait quite silently ; and he had been waiting for more than an hour when at last he heard the click of the wooden latch. Barbara came out, stood at the top of the five little steps, listening, as it were. How was it that she



seemed to know so quickly that someone was there, that that someone was Hartas Theyn? She certainly could not see him in the dim light that was where he stood.

'It's late for you to be so far fra Garlaff,' she said, coming to the edge of the little wooden platform and bending over. Hartas could see her now in the light from the window, and he could hear her voice, the unencouraging tone of it, the absence of all welcome in it, of all pleasure. And yet what was the meaning of that slight difficulty that seemed almost like tremulousness for the moment? Hartas was perplexed.

'It's none so late,' he replied, putting much emotion into the quiet emotionless words, and drawing nearer to the gallery as he spoke. 'It's none so late. Why there's lights all over the place yet.'

'The lights i' the windows o' fashionable folk,' Bab replied, with unaccustomed satire. 'They're goin' to bed, worn out wi' lissenin' to the band all the mornin', an' goin' up the cliff side i' the lift to lunch. An' then they get more tired wi' drivin' aboot i' carriages all the afternoon; an' they've got to sit two hours at dinner, an' then there's the band again. Oh, it mun be a wearyin' life, that o' theirs. . . . Yet, after all, I'd like to try it for aboot a fortnight.'

'A fortnight! You'd never stand it that long, Barbara,' Hartas said, speaking in far gentler tones than Bab herself had used. 'But I don't wonder that you should wish for rest, for change of some kind. I often think of you, an' of the way you work, morn, noon, an' night. It would kill most women.'

Barbara laughed, not a pleasant laugh to the ears of Hartas Theyn.

'It ud' kill some men,' she said; 'it might even do 'em harm to hev to think of it. An' Ah don't wonder at you bein' struck wi' the sight o' work of any kind!'

Then she stopped, and presently added with even more of bitterness in her tone:

'If you've wondered about me, I've wondered about you, an' not a little! How do you ever get through the days? I should think every day was like a week; an' every week like a year. Oh, me! I can tell you I hev wondered how you live you life, an' you a man!'

Hartas was blushing under the cover of the night; Bab's too sharp and eager words smote upon his own consciousness of the unworthiness of his existence so that every sentence hurt him like a blow. And yet there was something to be said in answer. Mastering as well as he could the hot tide of anger that was pouring over him, making him quiver to the very lips, he strove to make reply.

'Every word you've said shows how little you know o' the truth,' he began, using more impressiveness in his tones than she had ever heard before. 'I've been idle anuff, most o' my life, I admit that, an' not without regret neither; but there was something to be said for me, if there'd been anybody to say it. I'd no eddication,



because when I was a little fellow I didn't want none, an' liked better bein' all day long about the Grange, wi' the men, an' horses, an' cattle. An' instead of anyone forcin' me to go to school, my father was proud o' me, because, bein' so little, I rebelled and wouldn't go. An' they used to set me upon the table, my uncle an' him, an' make me tell folk what I thowt o' the schoolmaster, an' when I said some impident thing, they'd all burst out i' laughter, as if I was the cleverest child i' the world.

'An' then by the time I was older, my father had grown indifferent, an' didn't care how things went, nor what I did, nor what nobody did. All he wanted was to be let alone. An' he dreaded when folks like the Canon or Mrs. Kerne came botherin' about me. An' because I was ignorant and uncultured, an' couldn't talk to them as an equal, an' felt nought but embarrassment, I grew to hate the sight o' them ; an' the hatred was like anger, an' made me insolent. An' all the while I was as miserable as I could be ; for the home's miserable anuff, I can tell you, and always has been. But 'twas never till I'd seen you, Bab, 'at I knew what shame was. Even when you were a little thing toilin' and moilin' on the scaur all day, I'd ha' given the world to ha' come an' helped you a bit, as that David Andoe used to do, as he does yet maybe, for aught I know.'

'I'm noän one to need help fra no man,' Barbara said, softened into replying with less of bitterness in her tone. 'An' if all be true as you say, why mebbe one ought to ha' been more sorry nor vexed wi' you. But it's noän over late i' life, it could never be over late to begin to mend.'

'An' that's just what I'm trying to do ; what I've been tryin' to do this year past, ever since I came to know more of you and your life. But there's nobody to see any change in me, or if they do see any it's only something to be sneered at, an' there's nought i' the world so bad to bear as a sneer because your tryin' to get yourself out o' the old groove.'

Bab did not reply for a moment or two, then she said eagerly :

'Does your sister sneer at you, the one that lives at the Rectory ? Does *she* sneer when she knows you're tryin' to make a new beginnin' ?'

Hartas felt his answer too deeply to have it on his tongue very readily.

'*Her* sneer !' he said at last ; 'her sneer at anything good ! Eh, but the very question shows how little you know her. . . . I don't know much of her myself, an' mebbe I might say "more's the pity" if I knew all it meant. An' it's not her fault 'at we're little more than strangers. I didn't want to know her, or to see her ; an' for years I took some pains to let her know that I didn't. An' yet she's never resented it i' no way ; mebbe she knows 'at there's things to be said on the other side. They've talked against her at the Grange, and said as how she was "stuck up ;" an' of all bad things to bear, that's about the worst to me. An' I believed them ; an' when I heard her talk it seemed to me 'at her way o' speakin'



was mincin', an' over fine ; an' her ways was far o'er fastidious for a rough chap like me. An' at last she was no more to me nor a stranger I'd never heard tell of. . . . But now,' and here Hartas's voice changed and softened—'now it seems as if she'd been carin' all the while, an' feelin' lonely, an' wishin' only as she'd had so much as one real brother or sister i' the world. I'd never dreamed of it, it's all new ; an'—well, if the truth must be told, I'm feeling as if there was nought I wouldn't do to please her. No, there's nought but one thing, an' that she'll never ask, no, she'll never ask it, Bab, if you let her know you as *I* know you. She'd never dream o' wishin' anybody to make such a sacrifice o' their whole life as that.'

For a little while Barbara was thoughtful and silent.

'No, your sister would never ask it,' she said, speaking in a low, fervid way, rather as if she spoke to herself for her own strengthening than as one speaking to another. 'She'd noän do that—not of her own free will ; but what she'd never ask for one might offer her, mebbe. . . . Or no, it 'ud ha' to be done without words ! Anyhow, for *her*, one would do it, an' willingly,—ay, more than willingly.'

## CHAPTER XIV.

### THE STORY OF A MISTAKE.

'And soon we feel the want of one kind heart  
To love what's well, and to forgive what's ill  
In us—that heart we play for at all risks.'

*Festus, P. J. BAILEY.*

HARTAS quite understood ; comprehending not only the meaning of the woman he loved, but the depth of her strong determination. She was capable of this thing that she was evidently revolving in her mind ; and the idea thus newly and suddenly presented to him was sufficiently disturbing.

'When have you seen my sister last ?' he asked, after a pause which had given him time to view the situation with some dismay.

'This afternoon,' replied Bab without hesitation. 'I'd been over to Danesborough for flithers ; and had come back to Ulvstan by the train . . . Miss Theyn was i' the street, in her carriage. She'd her hands full o' roses ; an' she gave 'em to me.'

'An' you'd sacrifice, not only yourself but me, because o' that !' Hartas exclaimed, the hastiness in his tone betraying much that the merciful darkness was hiding. But though Bab could not discern the hot tide of colour that had risen to his face, she felt the change in his accents, and was silent.

'Because of a handful o' flowers that never cost her a ha'penny, an' likely anuff was never meant for you, you're willin' to throw me an' all my hopes overboard for ever ! . . . Good heavens, what strange sort o' stuff a woman's made of !'

Even as he spoke he remembered the day on the beach, when, for all his natural want of perspicaciousness, he had discovered that



his sister had suddenly won more of Bab's favour and affection than he had been able to win by the effort of months, nay, of years. At that moment he had been half glad, half proud ; but he saw it all in a new light now ; and the vision exasperated him, though he could hardly have told whether it was his sister or Barbara Burdas against whom his anger was turned. He had not been particularly hopeful before ; but this new fear seemed to destroy the hope he had had, and to do this with a completeness for which he himself could not have accounted.

'I didn't come down here to hev no words,' he said, remembering sadly enough the loving, longing feeling that had beset him as he walked down from the Grange ; a longing to pour out all his heart to Bab ; to tell her of his new consciousness of wasted life, of his remorse and repentance, of his only half-comprehended desire for better things. For him, as for most human beings, a true love was proving that it held the key to truer life, to fuller light. He had not attained to anything yet ; but knowledge was coming to him hourly, that attainment was not only desirable, not only possible, but imperative, if he would live at all, if he would not remain in that slough wherein he had lain so long. He put it down to the fact of his ignorance that all seemed so obscure, so undefined, that instead of some clear aim and rule to guide him he had only a more or less vague longing for better things—a longing that seemed to be bound up inseparably with his desire to win the love of Barbara Burdas.

'The cygnet finds the water, but the man  
Is born in ignorance of his element,  
And feels out blind at first, disorganized  
By sin i' the blood—his spirit-insight dulled  
And crossed by his sensations. Presently  
He feels it quicken in the dark sometimes,  
When mark, be reverent, be obedient,  
For such dumb motions of imperfect life  
Are oracles of vital Deity,  
Attesting the hereafter.'

The aspiration which had come to Hartas Theyn did not touch any far-off future ; it was held by strong bonds to the disappointing and cruel-seeming present ; and out of all his thinking, and feeling, and enduring, hardly anything could be put into words. Bab understood how it was with him ; and the long silence did not seem long to her, the torrent of her own thought and emotion was too full and rapid for that, and certainly neither of them dreamed that *another* was impatient of the pause, that *another* listened for the next word—listened breathlessly and eagerly. Having hitherto caught only the tones of the speakers, and perceiving that these did not betoken the friendliness of feeling believed on the Forecliff to exist between Barbara Burdas and the Squire's son, it was no wonder that Nan Tyas should be drawn by an irresistible curiosity to listen. Nan was not at any time what might be called an over-scrupulous woman. Though she had now been married some six



months, she was still little more than a girl; and being David Andoe's sister she had especial reasons for wishing to know the truth.

She was not a loving woman. Passion of various kinds, she might already be acquainted with, but the gentleness of true affection was as strange and unaccustomed to her as to any of her ungentle family. Yet she had some liking for her brother David, a liking made up of regard for his forbearance, of respect for his indomitable high principle, for his unswerving effort after a perfectly patient endurance of trials which she but half understood to be trying at all. She knew, as she could not fail to do, of his unhappy love for Barbara Burdas, and in this matter her sympathy, if indeed 'sympathy' her fierce and narrow feeling could be called, was all for him.

To-night accident had led her round by old Ephraim's cottage, or the 'Sagged Hoose,'\* as it was called upon the Forecliff, from the fact of it having suffered so severely in a landslip as to have lost all claim to perpendicularity. Strangers looked on it with amazement when they knew that it was inhabited by a family of respectable fisher-folk. But Nan was not thinking of the house, or of its crookedness, as she went rapidly by the path from the Andoes' home to her own, a path that led behind the Sagged House, and away across the waste sea-front of the rock to her own cottage on the southern side. It was late, half-past ten at least; and though Nan was alone she had no expectation of anything happening, least of all anything that would enable her to carry a word of comfort to her brother David.

Nan was already weary of standing there by the tarred paling that ran along the edge of what had once been a stone-quarry, and was just above old Ephraim's cottage. She knew that the Squire's son was still there; she could discern the outline of his figure as he leaned upon a solitary gate-post, from which the gate had gone long ago. Barbara, being on the little wooden gallery, was out of sight, though not out of hearing.

'I didn't come down to hev no words,' Hartas had said at last, speaking with much more of sullen anger in his tone than was in his heart.

Bab, feeling sorry for him, and being in pain and perplexity for herself, made no reply.

Naturally the mind of each had wandered far enough from the point touched at that moment; still Hartas seemed as if he would take up the conversation where it had been left off.

'No; I didn't come down here to quarrel,' he said, in gentler and truer tones. (Nan Tyas could distinguish every syllable.) 'I came

\* Sagged (according to Robinson's Yorkshire 'Glossary') means 'bulged out at the side, as a bowing wall.' But the word is used in other ways. For instance, a woman's gown, drawn at the seams, will be said to 'sag.' So, too Shakespeare in *Macbeth* v. iii. :—

'The heart I bear  
Shall never sag with doubt.'



for a purpose very different fra that, Barbara ; an' I can't go no roundabout way to it neither. . . . You know what it is ! If I've never asked you the same question in plain words before, I've all but done it many a time, when you've stopped me, either by one means or another ; an' I must ask it now. An' I'll say the truth as to what I believe. I don't think 'at you care so much for me, not yet ; but I do think 'at you'll come to care, if you'll let me hev the chance o' winnin' you. Hev I made a mistake, Bab, i' thinkin' 'at you don't allus look at me so coldly now as you used to do ? I've fancied so sometimes lately ; an' I've been that glad when you seemed to give me a kinder look 'at I've hardly known whether I were walkin' on the ground or on the air. It's none my way to talk wild, as you know ; or I'd say things stronger nor that. Mebbe I may say 'em yet if you give me the answer I want. . . . Bab, you will say it ? You'll be my wife ? I know you will ! You'll never cut a fellow off frev all the hope he hes i' the world ? An' you shan't repent ; no, never for a moment so long as you live, if I can help it.'

Still there was silence.

Barbara's heart was beating with such wildness as it had perhaps never known before ; and the tears would have come but for the strong forcefulness exerted to keep them back. Never yet, never for one moment, had temptation been so strong ; never before had it seemed so light a matter that Miss Theyn should some day blush for *her* ignorance, that Miss Theyn's kind eyes should droop in sorrow because of *her* awkwardness, *her* ill-bred ungraciousness. This was the sole hindrance on the surface of her thought ; but there was more below, much that she only half comprehended. What was it, that something that spoke of some light to be had, some good to be gained, some platform to be reached, the lower step of which might be reached by even a gatherer from the limpet rocks ? The one thing that was clear to her in this perplexing moment was that she must at least wait, that she must not obey the longing—it was pressing upon her somewhat heavily to-night—the longing to lay down her life's hard burden, and rest upon the deep and true affection offered to her. Bab did not doubt its truth.

If she had spoken openly, she would have said :

'I do love you, even now ; and my love for you is sweet to me ; yours for me is comforting—sustaining. Love is more than all I had dreamed or imagined. But something within me is incredulous of so great a good, and will not let me accept it.'

It even seemed as if in this strong and strange contest Bab's courage was giving way—the one great quality which had seemed to place her so high above her fellows, leaving her timid and helpless as women are supposed always to be. And inevitably Hartas Theyn discerned the fact. We hide nothing from each other. Dissimulation at its best is never more than a partial success.

'You've no answer, Bab ?' he asked, with tender surprise in his tone ; but intense feeling was underneath.



For all his fever of anxiety he could yet be glad that no quick and emphatic denial had swept his hope to the ground.

At last Barbara spoke.

'No,' she said. And Hartas knew, and Nan Tyas knew, that her voice was the voice of one subduing a very passion of sobs and tears. 'No, I've no answer. . . . That's just the truth—I can't make no answer.'

In one moment, one misguided moment later, Hartas Theyn was beside her on the little wooden gallery, his arm was round her, her face was raised to his, all unawares and against her will. For one not-to-be-forgotten moment, Barbara Burdas was overmastered by the mingled forces of love and strength.

And Nan Tyas knew it all, stooping there in the darkness, bending forward with her ear turned in the direction of the cottage door, and her face hot with the strain of listening. She knew everything.

'I have no answer,' Bab had said.

'Then I'll take an answer!' Hartas Theyn exclaimed in the first flush of his momentary success.

But the next moment Barbara had freed herself with a single strong effort. Standing apart, alone, conscious to her finger-tips of a new shame, a new and unexpected humiliation, speaking louder than before, and far more angrily than she knew:

'Take an answer!' she exclaimed. And Hartas Theyn could see the flashing of her eyes in the faint light from the window; he could discern in her tone the surprise and indignation that had come upon her with his ill-judged action. 'You'll take an answer!' she repeated. 'Eh, but it's little you know o' me, if you think I'm one to be treated so! . . . No, Mr. Theyn, I'll find an answer noo, since you're so eager for one; an' it's soon said. You asked me to be your wife, an' I say, *No, never!* I'd marry no man 'at showed me so plain he'd no more respect for me nor that! There's my answer! . . . Good-night.'

Nan Tyas heard the quick bolting of the cottage door, the sharp rattle of the window-blind as it dropped over the panes. Then she knew that Hartas Theyn walked away with slow and heavy step and frequent pauses, but not pausing near enough or long enough to hear the sound that Nan heard later—the sound of subdued and bitter weeping.

'She'll noän wed *him*,' Nan said to herself, as she went homeward. 'Her pride'll never stand such ways as that. There's more nor a chance for David yet; as he shall know afore he's a day older!'



## CHAPTER XV.

## SOME ART CRITICS.

‘ Humanity is great ;  
 And if I would not rather pore upon  
 An ounce of ugly, common, human dust,  
 An artisan’s palm, or a peasant’s brow,  
 Unsmooth, ignoble, save to me and God,  
 Than track old Nilus to his silver roots,  
 . . . . . Set it down  
 As weakness—strength by no means.’

E. B. BROWNING.

ALL the morning, since the first ebbing of the tide, Damian Aldermede had been sitting there under the cliffs beyond Yarva Ness, his easel with its broad canvas before him, a white umbrella behind him, a carefully kept and curiously-set palette, with the usual sheaf of brushes in his hand. A noticeable figure he made in that wide stretch of land and sea. Usually the scene was a more or less dreary one, inclining to a melancholy speculativeness, or to unhopeful acquiescence ; but no such mood might beset any responsive human being on a morning so free, so fresh, so blue, so sunny as this. Damian Aldermede’s tall, thin frame was not the home of a soul that could be called unresponsive.

After working with more than his usual rapidity for a couple of hours, putting on canvas, with what truth and poetry of truth were in his power, the great gray nab that ran out from the land, and crossed a considerable stretch of the sea, he was now resting awhile, surveying the result of that long spell of sea-born inspiration. He was not wholly satisfied ; what true creator is ever satisfied with his own creation ?

In all the Bible is there no more striking and suggestive passage than that one to be read in the Book of Genesis : ‘ And it repented the Lord that He had made man on the earth ; and it grieved Him at His heart.’

This is startling ; but it is entirely conceivable ; and a man might find motive-power enough for a change of life, were he to try but for one hour to grasp all that that strange and awful repentance must have meant. It must have involved and included so much more than we can even dream of here. The repentance of an All-knowing and *All-foreseeing* God ! We imagine it to be contradictory ; and so it is to our finite reasoning and understanding. Our utmost effort can bring about no satisfactory reconciliation, and few altogether reverent minds could wish to attempt any such reconciliation. The great hereafter, heaven itself, is made more attractive by the thought of all we have to learn ; and if to this you join the added power of learning and discerning that we may hope for, we get a brighter and more living glance and grasp of that eternity which, being in a large sense vague, may not be entirely unappalling to some, and those not the worst, not the most dead to aspiration.

By the ancient Greeks—the worthiest and best of them—the



pleasures of the intellect were accounted the highest of all, the pleasures of learning, of knowing, of thinking, of discovering; and this pleasure was inherent, not heightened in any way by the display of knowledge as an accomplishment. So far as these authors and thinkers of that olden time knew they were wise and right; but the pleasures of the still finer, the still higher part of man's nature had not then been made manifest as they were to be made by the development of a new dispensation. This higher discerning was reserved for the followers of One despised, rejected, misunderstood in His own day, save by a responsive few. We, the inheritors of these few, seeing by their light, discern more clearly the nature of the most perfect felicity possible to man, and therefore have keener appetite for it, keener hope and expectancy. By this hope we live. The miserable man is he whose hope is dulled—dulled by care, by sin, or by neglect of spiritual culture. Does it need the combined effort of the three to destroy the soul meant for far other than destruction? That they run one into another in ways unexpected, undreamed, we all of us know; and those who deny most strenuously the existence of any tempting personal spirit of evil, must yet admit the existence of some ingenious and most forcible laws of deterioration. . . . These we do not understand; how should we? But we can at least believe in them sufficiently to dread a time when disbelief may be no longer possible.

It is not the man who, to use an easy saying, is 'born good'—to whom purity and uprightness are as first instincts; it is not this man who can enter fully into the life of him whose soul is weighted from the beginning with strong impulses toward evil that beset him, body and mind. And here is the root of much of our harsh judgment. We see the error, but not the strange and peculiar force of circumstance that led the erring man into sin before he was well aware. We see his fall, but not the long and sore strife with overwhelming temptation.

But while we are thanking God that we are not as this man, it may be that God Himself is stooping from heaven to comfort him with all Divine and most efficacious comfort.

'Which of My Saints, of the men possessed by the Prayer-spirit, from Abraham to Gordon, was without spot or stain? Which of them was unblessed by repentance? Was not the oft and grievously erring David a man after My own heart? Did not Magdalen love the more because there was in her so much to be forgiven? Is it not an echo, and also a proof of the felicitous bliss of My Divine Forgiveness, that there is no finer and more perfect human emotion than that between two loving human souls, one of which receives full forgiveness from the other?'

So one might hear, if one listened, with other words more consoling still. Damian Aldenmede had heard.

'The upright man is dear to Me,' saith One. 'The man who loves much is dearer yet.'



And there is even another. 'To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with Me in My Throne.'

Him that overcometh ! This is the touchstone. The man whose way is plain, and smooth, and easy ; into whose life no question as to strife, as to yielding, has ever entered ; this man may not be shut out from the kingdom, since such slight test was given him whereby he might prove himself worthy to enter. But not for him the shout that shall go up before the Throne of God as greeting to those who have come out of great tribulation.

'In My Father's house are many mansions.'

You had only to look once into the face of Damian Aldenmede to see that he was now, at least in one sense, like the Master whom he would fain follow, were it but afar off. At the first sight you knew that you looked upon a man over whose head the waves and storms of life had swept pitilessly.

It was a calm enough face now—indeed, the most forcible impression you received was one of a human being, strong and tranquil ; and in the same moment you saw that both the strength and the tranquillity were of the kind that come by long and sore strife.

Contradictions were not wanting—they seldom are on the face of man or woman of middle age. The young, who have not entered into the fight, the old, who have fought and won—or lost—these may impress you with unity, with consistency—seldom others.

On this artist's face, for instance, except when in perfect repose, the extreme gravity would be half betrayed by certain curves that declared him not incapable of humour ; and the stern, ascetic lines about the mouth were somewhat neutralised by the tenderness of the deep, sad, gray eyes—eyes that were sure to be uplifted to yours, at first with something of inquiry in them, of searching, as if once more he were asking the question :

'Shall one find human faith on this human earth ?'

It is Emerson who says : 'I confess to an extreme tenderness of nature on this point. It is almost dangerous to me to "crush the sweet poison of misused wine" of the affections. A new person is to me a great event, and hinders me from sleep.'

Not less keenly had Damian Aldenmede felt on this matter ; and, need one say it, all his life he had suffered in proportion to the depth and keenness of his feeling. The assurance most present with him now was that they are happiest who expect least.

In one thing at least he was fortunate, in being able to gratify his instinct for movement whenever the desire came upon him. If he had not wealth, then poverty did not chain him by the feet. If no ties of human love held him by beseeching hands, still he had freedom and power to secure the solitude he had come to prize so greatly. And he was not incapable of weighing, of duly appreciating the good he had.

As he sat there on the point of rock by his easel, looking out over the rippling tide, soothed by its murmuring, soothed yet more



by the far stretches of blue sky, of bluer distant sea, the extreme gravity of his face seemed to relax a little ; then his head was bent listeningly. By-and-by he smiled, and the austere face became winning, beautiful, pathetic, in the light of one of the most human of human pleasures.

It was only a song that he listened to, a doleful ballad of an older day, sung by girls' voices, that rose and fell upon the breeze, now seeming near, now floating afar. At last the words became plainly discernible :

And tell that ladye of my woe,  
And tell her of my love ;  
And give to her thys golden ring  
My tender faythe to prove.'

This was only sung by one or two voices ; next there came a little chatting and some laughing ; then a chorus came that might have been sung by a dozen voices at least :

Yee fayre dames of merrie Englande,  
Faste youre teares must posure ;  
For manye's the valiante Englishman  
That yee sall see noe more.'

All the voices joined in this, with some attempt at part-singing—crude, unscientific, yet with a certain most attractively wild sweetness. This was followed by a single voice, young, clear, fresh, as the wind from the sea. Now and then it seemed to vibrate tremblingly, as if to the pathos of the words of the old ballad :

'Fayre Alice shee sat her on the grounde,  
And never a worde shee spake ;  
But like the pale image dyd shee looke,  
For her hearte was nighe to breake.

'The rose that once soe ting'd her cheeke,  
Was nowe, alas ! noe more ;  
But the whiteness of her lillye skin  
Was fayrer than before.'

By this time the girls had come to the angle of the rock ; there were seven of them, tall, straight, strong-limbed fisher-girls, each with her basket of limpets on her head ; each dressed in her own half-masculine, wholly picturesque costume. They made a striking group as they came swiftly onward, with swinging gait, and gay, fearless countenance.

Damian Aldenmede, comparatively young though he might be, and certainly strong, was yet half envious of the quick, vivid, energetic life displayed in every movement made by these fisher-girls of Ulvstan Bight. He had discerned them before they were aware of his presence under the tall, blue-black rock.

It was the white umbrella, the easel with its wide canvas, that attracted their attention first. Then came a momentary pause in the singing, an echo of faint, surprised laughter ; but almost im-



mediately the singing was heard again. By this time it was the turn of the soloist, who was no other than Barbara Burdas.

‘And nowe came horsemen to the towne,  
That the prynce had sent with speede;  
With tydings to Alice that hee dyd live  
To ease her of her dreade.’

\* \* \* \* \*

‘But the page hee saw the lovelye Alice  
In a deepe, deepe grave let downe,  
And at her heade a greene turfe ylade,  
And at her feete a stone.’

So Barbara sang, in impressive, thrilling tones, that rose and died away with a plaintiveness that seemed to belong not altogether to the words, nor yet to the quaint and simple music, but to some special quality in the singer's own nature. She came onward, a little in advance of the others, singing as she came, and bearing her burden of limpets—some three stones of them—on her head, with a kind of unconscious consciousness of grace, the grace of strength in her bearing.

Damian Aldenmede, watching her, seemed to be almost perplexed in his surprise. The possibilities of form, of action, of attitude, were all awakened in him with that new forcefulness of impression which is so much to an artist. It is in such moments that he lives and moves—moves rapidly onward.

Yet nearer the girls came, smiling archly, singing—

‘Yee fayre dames of merrye Englande,’

lifting coquettish glances to the face of the artist who sat quietly by his easel, a man too grave, too long and too deeply tried, to be abashed in such a crisis as this. He raised his eyes to meet the eyes of the tall central figure—it was nearer to him than the others—and almost on the instant he became aware that this was not a first meeting. Apparently they were both aware of it.

But the others did not perceive. They were finishing their chorus in a light, easy way. With the last words they stopped by the easel, looked at the artist with eager, interested, surprised looks; then they turned to the nab in the distance, glancing from it to the canvas and back again with the glance supposed to be peculiar to practised and competent judges.

‘It's noän sa bad!’ said Nan Tyas encouragingly.

‘’Tisn't black anuff,’ Marget Scurr interposed.

‘It's ower far awaäy,’ remarked Nell Furniss.

Still the artist sat there with seeming impassiveness, listening to these untrained, yet perhaps not quite untrue art-critics; but since their remarks were in nowise addressed to him he could hardly make reply. He noticed many things as he sat there; amongst others, that Barbara Burdas had no word to say, critical or other. She was looking at the sketch with eager eyes, with parted lips, and with an air of intense interest, which naturally increased the artist's



interest in her. Meantime her companions were moving away, impatient for their noonday cup of tea and freshly-caught herring.

'Ya'll be comin' when yer ready, Bab!' Nan Tyas said, looking back with a meaning, mocking glance, which Bab returned with a steady look of warning. Damian Aldenmede saw and understood. This woman was not to be trifled with, even by her own companions. Her look, the power in it, the unconscious demand of self-respect it betrayed, increased his sudden regard for her, and awoke the desire to know more of her that was later to lead to such unexpected results. How frequently in our life does a look have the dynamic force of an event! No observant human being has lived his life without being aware of the fact that much is said, much done, in which neither word nor action has any part.

## CHAPTER XVI.

### BARBARA BETRAYS HERSELF.

'The effect of the indulgence of this human affection is a certain cordial exhilaration. In poetry and in common speech the emotions of benevolence and complacency which are felt towards others are likened to the material effects of fire, so swift, or much more swift, more active, more cheering, are the fine inward irradiations. From the highest degree of passionate love, to the lowest degree of good-will, they make the sweetness of life.'—EMERSON.

ANOTHER moment or two they stood in silence, then the artist said, with respectful tone and manner :

'Surely I have seen you somewhere before? . . . I have not been here for many years ; yet I seem to remember you.'

'Many years!' Barbara replied, looking into the worn, much enduring face before her, and all unconsciously using a less rude degree of the dialect of her daily life. 'Many years! It's just five this herring-time . . . I remember so well. It was the year after the big storm. Mebbe you heard o' that?'

'Yes, indeed ; and now I remember. You are Barbara Burdas,' he said, with an increase of gravity, and speaking as much to himself as to Bab. 'And many things come back with my remembrance of that same summer. . . . Yes, many things.'

Then he looked into the girl's face again, the face that had been so beautiful, so touching, five years ago, and now was more beautiful, more touching than ever. He could not but continue to look, to question silently, to answer himself silently also.

'There is trouble there,' he said, discerning by the light of the bygone trouble that was dead, but not buried, in his own heart. . . . 'There is sorrow, and yearning, and strength, and determination. There is no yielding, there is no joy, there is no hope. . . . Poor child! for you are but a child in spite of all contrary seeming.'

All this the artist's eyes said, and Barbara understood in a degree, and her face was slightly averted : she was not used to sympathy and understanding.



'I remember your loss,' the artist said. 'Your great loss! And your grandfather—how is he?'

'He's hearty, thank ya.'

'And the little ones—how many? I forget the number.'

'Four; they are all well, all bonny, all good. Nobbut Jack gives a bit o' bother now an' then; but he's not a bad bairn.'

'Only troublesome? You are right, that doesn't mean badness, very seldom. But about yourself—what have you been doing all these years? Working—that I know; but your life has not been all work, not merely work, that I can see! . . . I can see much, some things that make me sad. Will you forgive me if I speak out—if I say just what I am thinking? . . . I am fearing that you have suffered, that you have some sorrow now—some sorrow of which you do not speak. Am I mistaken? Am I reading your face wrongly?'

Bab blushed deeply and smiled with a very sad sweetness, while the tears that rose to her eyes were dashed away with most impatient gestures.

'It mun be a queer face, I'm thinkin',' she said, with a touch of inevitable satire. 'Or else you mun be one o' the thought-readers 'at one hears tell on i' the newspapers.'

'But *you* don't read the newspapers, Barbara?'

The girl looked up in surprise. The tone of the interlocutor's voice seemed to her to have reproach in it, which she could not understand, yet she must speak out.

'Yes,' she said. 'Every week o' my life I read the *Ulvstan Mercury*—most of it I read aloud to my gran'father—he's despart keen o' the news. I used to be troubled wi' the strange things 'at I didn't understand; an' more especially wi' the strange words 'at I couldn't saäy. But now I can guess sometimes; an' I've begun to see 'at it's all i' eddication, the difference atween folk. If you'd a thousand pounds i' gold, and had no eddication, you'd be nowhere. But the worst o' the newspaper is that there's never anuff about nothing to satisfy ya. There's a little bit o' this, an' a little bit o' that, an' ya're left just about as wise as ya were before.'

The artist was listening keenly, noting sadly. 'You have no books, then?' he asked after a time.

'Oh, yes, ever so many!' said Bab, rather proudly. 'We've the Bible, an' two prayer-books, an' the Methodist Hymn-book. An' then, noän so long ago, Miss Theyn gave me the "Pilgrim's Progress," an' I've read it three times through already. But there's other books I know, a sight o' them, an' I reckon they've all got something in 'em 'at one 'ud be the better for knowing. One sees them i' the shop-winda's. But then, they're not the sort o' books for such as me—very few o' them. They're meant for scholars—for such as——'

Barbara did not finish her sentence, nor did she sigh or look despondent as before. Instead, she merely turned her face and looked out to the sea, out to where the white-sailed ships were gleaming and gliding in the far blue distance.



'You are thinking of some one?' Damian asked gently.

'Yes,' Bab replied, with her usual instinct toward ingenuousness. 'Yes; I was thinking of her—Miss Theyn. You'll know her maybe?'

'No; I do not. I was here a very short time, and I did not then desire to know anyone. . . Who is Miss Theyn? The Rector's daughter?'

'No; the Rector's niece. Old Squire Theyn's her father; but she lives at the Rectory.'

'And she is a scholar?'

Bab raised her eyes swiftly.

'I should think she is!' was the emphatic reply. 'Eh! you should hear her talk—it's beautiful. The words is like—oh, I don't know what it is I would say! It's just as if one was lissenin' to music.'

'Is this lady young?'

'Yes . . . I think so; but Ah doän't know, for she's sa tall an' sa stately, at times she's even haughty like; but I can't tell hoo it is, ya seem ta love her more for it. Ah'm noän one 'ats given to takkin' nought fra nobody; but there's been times when I've felt 'at I would sooner take a blow frev her than a good word frev anybody else. . . . It is straänge!'

Damian was listening, noting. The girl was rising to eloquence, if not exactly of words, then of tone, of expression. The colour came and went on her face, the fine mouth quivered slightly, the blue eyes sparkled to each fresh thought.

'She is beautiful, this lady, I am sure?' the artist said, not with curiosity in his tone, but musingly, as if he confirmed something to himself.

'Beautiful!' exclaimed Bab, her own face irradiated to a beauty she herself could not have appreciated, even had she seen it. 'Beautiful! Eh, me! Ya should see her when she looks at ya, when she turns her head a little i' talkin', so as to look straight into yer eyes! An' then when she smiles—oh, I could never tell ya! Ya feel as if there's nought i' the world ya wouldn't do for her, an' ya feel dooncast like, an' ever sa far away, because the e's nought ya *can* do. I've laid awake o' nights many a time thinkin' whether there wasn't *nought* she'd hev, *nought* I could do. . . . There's the lobsters; they're despert sought after by the better sort o' folk. Ya know the old sayin' aboot Ulvstan lobsters and Flamboro' crabs? Well, but then, you see, so 'twere to be 'at she needed any such thing, she could buy a pot full, an' never miss the money. So where's the good?'

Damian Aldenmede was listening quite gravely, comprehending quite clearly.

'No,' he said, without a shadow of a smile. 'No, I shouldn't think of the lobsters. But needlework, now—something of that sort?'

'Needlework!' poor Bab said sadly. 'I've thought of it; but



I'm a despart poor hand. Ah can make a bit o' frock for Ailsie ; but it never fits, not rightly. Ah'd no help i' learnin', ya see, my mother bein' gone. An' as for fancy things, such as ya see i' the shops, beautiful silky things, wi' pearls an' velvet, why, a touch o' my hand 'ud drag 'em all to pieces, as if ya swept a ling besom across 'em. No, there's nought Ah can do, not a thing, but stare at her like a fool when Ah see her, an' then go home an' cry fit to burst the heart in my body because Ah can never be nothing to her—nothing at all !'

It would be difficult to describe with any accuracy the impression that Damian was receiving from the fisher-girl's betrayal of the deep affection won by a woman so far above her in all that makes difference in human sight. He would not deliberately have called himself a student of human nature, yet few things deserving notice passed him by unobserved.

One of the many ideas pressing upon him now was this, that here was a woman, young, eager, capable of some culture, yet held by ignorance as some are held by physical blindness. He could see her, as it were, groping for light, patient under the need for it, but with deep sadness lying concealed under the patience. What if he could help a little ?'

Not being quite a young man, having drunk somewhat deeper than most men of the cup of experience, he could not all at once give way to the sudden impulse that beset him—an impulse that would have led him to surround this girl with such books as might be useful, and to help her to suitable teaching. He must think of it. Yet he would retain, or rather acquire, the acquaintance needful to the carrying out of his project, if he should decide to continue his intention.

For awhile he had been silent, looking down to the stone-strewn beach at his feet, apparently wondering if this or that pebble were the celebrated 'plum-pudding stone' of Ulvstan Bight. But it was another kind of wondering that really occupied his brain.

It moved him to speech at last.

'Do you work *all* the day ?' he asked, 'or is there some definite time set to your working ? What, for instance, do you usually do in the mornings from ten to one ?'

Bab smiled thoughtfully.

'Ah do a deal i' that time, most days,' she replied. 'But the worst's over afore one o'clock. As a rule, we're at the flither-beds by four these light mornin's—that is, when the tide fits.'

'And the flither-beds are two miles away ?'

'Nearer three.'

'And you come back about this time ?'

'It's accordin' to the tide. We'll be late this week, an' most o' next.'

'I see ! Then if I were to ask you to be kind enough to stand or sit for me, whilst I make a picture, a likeness of you, it could only be in the afternoon ?'



'Only i' the afternoon these tides,' said Bab, again blushing deeply.

'And you have no objection? You would oblige me by coming, by remaining in the same position here on the rocks for an hour or more at a time? . . . I do not, of course, wish you to give me your time without adequate return.'

Did Bab understand this 'art of putting things'? Damian was not sure. The girl looked into his face half wonderingly. Then she said, in her simple, straightforward, yet not undignified manner:

'I'd like to come. . . . I like to lissen to ya when ya speak. . . . Can I come to-morrow? What time will ya want me? Two o'clock, will I saäy?'

## CHAPTER XVII.

### A REVELATION.

'Oh what a power hath white simplicity!'

ALMOST as a matter of course, Barbara had told her grandfather of her interview with the gentleman down on the rocks by the ness. Old Ephraim listened silently, smoking his pipe, looking up somewhat curiously into Bab's face.

At last he spoke.

'Thoo mun mak' a bargain wiv him, Bab!' he said, slowly and emphatically. 'Deän't thoo goä wastin' thy tahme for now't. They can afford it, them artises. Why, oäd Tommy Battensby tell'd me wiv his oän tongue 'at yon man 'at painted sa mony pictures o' t' watermill up aboon Garlaff had meäde a thoosan' pun oot o' that bit o' beck alleän—a thoosan' pun i' less nor fower year! Think on't! Think o' that noo, an' deän't thoo be ower eäger-like. Haud off a bit, an' he'll come doon—niver fear!'

Poor Bab! She hardly knew why this speech jarred upon her—why everything seemed to be jarring just now. She said but little in reply to the old man's characteristic warnings and exhortations. He had never before seemed to her to be selfish or grasping. Now, though they were quite alone, the idea of 'making a bargain' with the kindly and understanding stranger caused the colour to rise to her face for very pain. Already she had been thinking in a vague way that if he should ask her to accept money she would not take it. Other girls on the Forecliff had taken payment for the same service, she knew; and they had boasted of it afterward; and Barbara had felt herself to shrink from self-comparison with these. Now she shrank more than ever, since coarse handling had made her feel as if the transaction itself would have a certain coarseness in it; and a sting was already in the pleasure that was to have been so pure and so welcome.

Nevertheless, she went down to the rocks the next day; and Damian Aldenmede saw with something that was almost distress that she had brushed her luxuriantly-straying auburn hair until it



was as nearly smooth as it could be made to lie, that she had discarded her red shawl and her blue guernsey for a badly-fitting lilac-print gown and a clean white apron. The change was as a complete transfiguration.

'Who shall say that dress goes for nothing after this?' he exclaimed inwardly. Outwardly he was as much at a loss to know what to say as if he had been dealing with a duchess.

But Bab saw instantly that something was wrong. Was it little Ailsie's presence? Bab had brought her sister down with her, thinking that she might cover any awkward moment that might occur; and also because she was never so happy as when the child was by her side.

She was a winning little thing, as Damian saw at once, despite the Sunday frock and the hideously-shaped hat of white straw, with its grass-green feather. Bab had daringly gone to the best milliner's shop in the town to buy the hat, knowing that she would have to pay for her temerity; but she had not grudged her hard-earned money, since little Ailsie was so pleased and had kissed her so warmly. It had made chatter for a week on the Forecliff; but nowhere had it created the impression it was creating now. The artist was in despair, for the little one's face grew upon him with every glance he gave. It was so soft, so sweet, so pure, so touching, that he resolved at once to paint the sisters together if he might. The contrast between Bab's largely-moulded figure, her handsome features, her air of independence, and the gentle, wistful, delicate appearance of the seven years old child at her feet, was too striking to be foregone. He would make an effort, a desperate effort if need were.

There had been a moment of awkwardness, of silence, of mutual disappointment, which Barbara did not at all understand. At last the artist spoke:

'I ought to have told you,' he began, speaking in a kindly, regretful way—'I ought to have said that I wanted you to come just as you were yesterday, without your bonnet, and wearing your work-day dress, as I wear mine,' he added, glancing at his suit of gray tweed. 'And the little one—don't be offended with me, but she is lovely; and if I might paint her too, I should be more grateful to you than I can say just now. . . . You are not angry?'

The latter question came because of the change that the artist saw on Bab's face—the tide of hot colour, the quivering of eyelids over eyes, that seemed as if they might fill with tears on ever so little more provocation.

'Angry? No,' she said, restraining herself by a great effort; 'but when I thought I'd done everything I could to please you, it's——'

'It seems a little hard,' said the artist, speaking so gently and sympathetically that Bab could not but perceive that he knew all about it. And as a glimmering of the true state of affairs began to dawn upon her mind, the tendency to tears became a tendency



to smile ; and the artist smiled too ; and little Ailsie laughed a soft low laugh that drew all attention to herself.

‘Then what will we do?’ said Bab, quite herself again, and having a generous twinkle of humour in her glance, that proved her quickness in passing from one extreme to the other. ‘What will we do? Come down again to-morrow afternoon, me wi’ my creel on my head, an’ Ailsie wiv a string o’ dabs in her hand? How would that be like suitin’ ya?’

‘It would suit me to a T,’ replied Damian, entering into Bab’s new mood all the more gladly because of the moment of pained constraint. He could not help adding, ‘How quick you are to see!’

‘D’ya think so? D’ya think that truly?’ Bab asked, with sudden glad earnestness.

‘Certainly I do, or I should not have said it.’

Bab did not ask the next question that was trembling on her lips. Instead, she paused, and looked out, as her frequent way was, over the peaceful sea, that seemed so wide, so suggestive of things not to be reached or touched, yet always to be desired.

‘Ya really meant that?’ she said, looking into the grave face before her with a wistful, eager, pathetic look that marked the relationship between herself and little Ailsie. ‘Ya mean it—that I am not sa stupid?’

‘You stupid? By no means!’ was the emphatic reply. ‘What could make you think that?’

‘Everything,’ said Bab decidedly. ‘I know nothing, not as *they* know. I can’t even speak as they speak. An’ if I were even to *try* down here, there’d be nought but laughin’ an’ jeerin’. Oh, it’s hard—harder than you think!’

Again the artist was silent, impressed by the fervour of the girl’s manner ; discerning that there was more below the surface than he could expect to arrive at all at once. Surely there must be something beyond mere admiration for the Rector’s niece underneath all this fervidness, all this strong desire ! And then, quite suddenly, he recollected that he might have known the truth—perhaps more than the truth, if he had not, somewhat peremptorily, closed the lips of his too-loquacious landlady on the previous evening. Now he had to bear the result of his want of knowledge.

‘I think I can understand,’ he said presently, putting down his brushes and palette, and seating himself upon a big, brown, tangle-covered stone. He had previously offered his camp-stool to Ailsie, who sat perched upon it with the prettiest ease of manner and bearing ; her little brown legs crossed, her clumsily-clad feet swaying down below. Overhead the tall cliffs were towering darkly ; the gulls were screaming and chuckling in and out.

‘I think I can understand,’ he went on. ‘I can remember the time, though it seems long enough ago, when nothing seemed to me so precious as knowledge. And—don’t answer me unless you like—is it *that* that is troubling you, that you have not what the world



calls education? Is it *that* you are desiring so much—for its own sake?’

He might well ask the question. For the most part, those who do so desire it are the last to dream of external help. They have helped themselves, unknowingly, unconsciously, long before they were aware of what they were doing; and there is no crisis of their life wherein they awaken to demand of others some aid in taking the first step. But though Barbara Burdas was not of these, her desire was not the less real.

She listened to what Damian Aldenmede was saying wonderingly; her face was bent downward, her forehead drawn into lines by the weight of the thought presented to her.

‘For its oän sake,’ she murmured presently. Then she lifted her troubled eyes to the artist’s face, and continued, ‘Hoo can one tell? Would I ha’ cared if it hadn’t been for *him*? Would I ha’ cared at all?’

Damian could only look at the girl with inquiring looks. She comprehended the inquiry, and an expression of pain came over her face.

‘Ya don’t know! How should ya? Yet I thought ya *might* have heard, sin’ it’s all over the place. . . . It’s him; her brother, as I told you of yesterday. . . . But, oh me! what am I saying? He’s nought to me—no more than the wind that blows. . . . What is it in ya that makes me talk o’ things that never was, nor never can be? . . . What have I said? There’s nought in it—no, nought at all!’

‘You are speaking of the brother of the lady you mentioned yesterday—Miss Theyn. Do you know him? Do you know him intimately?’

‘I know anuff about him—more nor a nuff,’ Bab replied. Then, instantly remembering herself, regretting her words, she said, speaking more sadly, ‘All I’ve got to do wiv him now is to forget him—to forget I ever set my eyes on him, or ever opened my lips to speak to him, or ever let my ears listen to a word he’d got to say.’

Damian Aldenmede was not blind, nor altogether shortsighted. It was but natural that he should construe for himself the words he had heard; and his own past experience led him to an almost dangerous verge of sympathy.

‘I think I know all you would wish me to know,’ he replied; ‘and I see that you are distrusting yourself—your own wish for something more than the mere production of a daily tale of bricks. Yet why should you—especially since you are so sure that you have no other wish, no other hope? And yet I think I understand you, the doubt you are in; and, if I may advise you, I should say, put all doubt aside, and trust your higher instinct. I speak to you out of my own past experience when I urge you to set your mind on the attainment of something outside yourself.’

‘Some knowledge, ya mean—some larning? I’m thinkin’ on it always, night an’ day.’



'Then no greater earthly gift could have been given to you than a desire like that. I know what I am saying. I have tried to influence others to the same end; but I have failed for the most part because I could not put into other minds, other hearts, *the spring* that moves my own—the *mainspring of desire*. . . . This great blessing you possess; however you may have come by it, I perceive that you have it; and to any man who can see as I see, who is looking out over the dreary waste of human life as I am looking to discern one human soul like yours, truly hungering and thirsting for something more than mere bread and shelter, is, believe me, to see a sight to encourage one—to make one glad. Nothing could give me greater pleasure than to be allowed to help you. It would take the dreariness from my evenings while I am here as few other things could do. Please say that you consent.'

Bab was watching him, gravely, wonderingly. There was a quiver at the corner of her mouth—a light in her blue earnest eyes.

'Do I take ya rightly?' she said, speaking as if with difficulty. 'You would be willin' to larn me something yoursel'?'

'Yes—more than merely willing.'

'An' ya think I *could* larn?'

'I am quite sure of it; quite sure that you could learn everything that it is necessary for you to know.'

Bab remained silent, and Damian turned away, searching among the pebbles at his feet for the belemnites so frequently found on the beach at Ulvstan. He would give her time to think of his proposal.

But by-and-by he was startled by the sound of a sob; one deep, half-restrained burst of emotion. He turned to where the girl was standing, little Ailsie by her side. The child was clinging to her, lifting a pale beseeching face.

'Doän't cry, Barbie; don't cry! What's he done to ya? What's he said?'

'It's noän *him* 'at's made me cry, honey,' Bab answered, taking the little one in her arms, kissing her to hide her own emotion. 'It's noän him! . . . He's kind an' good; an' we mun be kind to him if we can. But we can't; that's the worst of bein' poor. There's nought you can do for nobody to show 'em how ya care.'

'There are various ways of showing,' said the artist. 'And since you feel that you would be glad to do some good turn for me, please believe I am equally glad to do something for you. But we mustn't stop at words; and since I may not stay here very long, we must waste no time. How much time can you give me? A very clever man once said that an hour a day, regularly given, would enable a student to climb almost any particular mountain of knowledge he might wish to climb. Can you give me that—a whole hour daily?'

'Ay, an' more,' replied Bab eagerly, wiping some tears away with the corner of her apron. 'There's four-an'-twenty hours in a daäy;



an' I'm never i' bed more nor five on 'em. . . . But you've yer oän work to think on.'

'So I have ; but I seldom work more than four hours a day. My eyes grow less sensitive to colour after that ; and for conscience' sake I desist. So don't think of me. I have idle time enough—time that I shall be glad to spend in a manner that will bring me more gratification than all the art-work I shall accomplish in my lifetime.'

'Doesn't yer work give ya no pleasure ?'

'It doesn't give me the pleasure I long for, the pleasure of being in any sense satisfied with what I do.'

'Still ya go on trying ?'

'Always trying, always hoping.'

'Then mebbe ya'll come to it at last ! . . . I hope ya will, for you've been sa good to me.'

'You will let me be good ? You will let me come in the evenings for an hour, shall I say seven to eight ? Would that be a suitable time ?'

'It would be suitable anuff,' said Bab, again changing colour, and speaking with some indecision. 'But couldn't I spare you the trouble o' comin' ? Couldn't I come to Mrs. Featherstone's ?'

'No,' the artist replied. 'It would be better that I should come to your grandfather's house. Is he at home in the evenings ?'

'Yes : allus. But he'd not be i' the waäy. He smokes his pipe, an' dozes till bedtime without much talkin'.'

'Then I'll come to-night, if I may. And you will forgive me for the mistake of this morning ?'

Bab smiled,—not the scornful smile she was so apt to use.

'Forgive !' she said. 'Ay, an' forget an' all.'

'You won't forget to come down to the rocks again to-morrow ?'

'No,—an' I'll not forget 'at you like us best i' the every-daäy wear. . . . Come, Ailsie ! Saäy good-bye to the gentleman. We mun be goin' home. Gran'father 'll be wantin' his tea badly !'

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### AT ORMSTON MAGNA.

'To man propose this test—

Thy body at its best,

How far can that project thy soul on its lone way ?'

ROBERT BROWNING.

It is strange how, in some lives—lives that seem fair, pure, peaceful—any true, and high, and perfectly spiritual aspiration is yet a rare thing. The outside world looks on, seeing a man or woman whose life is without spot or stain ; whose name is on every list of names charitable ; whose place in church is never empty ; whose whole demeanour tells of a careful walk, with uprightness in every sense of the term. And that outside world is not mistaken ; it



seldom is. Hypocrisy may remain practically undetected ; it never passes altogether without suspicion.

And yet even that outwardly stainless, and inwardly true human being may be aware of a lowness, a deadness, that is almost as bad to bear as any consciousness of actual sin could be.

Thorhilda Theyn was a woman of too high nature to permit of much deadness of spirit without self-protest. Hitherto her inner life had consisted largely of a kind of mild warfare, with more of compromise in it than she cared to perceive except on the occasions when she was compelled to be honest with her own soul. And these were perturbed times ; for she did not spare herself. Any other person, knowing her whole life, would have set down much to the exaggeration natural to an imaginative woman.

The heart knows its own bitterness, and the soul knows its own failure ; and few could have felt more acutely than did Miss Theyn that her life was below her own highest standard.

And she had no real excuse—this she knew.

‘I have no cares,’ she had admitted to herself ; ‘my mind is not distracted by the need of fighting for bread. I have no doubts ; God has mercifully given me a soul, a mind, that can accept His every saying without question. I have no hindrances to bar me from the spiritual life, none but such as are within myself, *growing, increasing* within myself !

*‘I am too much at ease !’* Trouble might stir me ; and yet, how I shrink from it, even from the idea of it !

‘If I had to live Gertrude’s life, for instance, I think I should not care for another year of existence. These surroundings are so much to me ; the ease, the comfort, the never having to move from my sofa or easy-chair, not so much as to write a note unless it is one I wish to write ; the warmth and softness of everything, the very fire in my bedroom night and morning for nine months of the year ; the fact of having a carriage at command morn, noon, and night ; the knowledge that no wish of mine for food or dress, or for any of the little luxuries of daily life, is ever disregarded or forgotten, all these things are as the air I breathe. I have never once thought of them definitely till now ; but now I know that I could not exist without them. I fear that the smallest deprivation would be intolerable.’

All these things Miss Theyn had admitted to herself, and not without self-blame, on the evening before the garden-party at Ormston Magna. The party of the year it was to be, so everybody was saying ; and Thorhilda was not without suspicion that it was being given with a definite end in view, an end that concerned herself. She would be made to perceive more clearly than ever before Percival Meredith’s ability to gather about him, in his own home, whatever of rank or fashion the neighbourhood contained.

There were several county families within a certain radius of miles. Lord Hermeston, of Hermeston Peel, had accepted the invitation. Lady Thelton and her four honourable daughters were



coming. Sir Robert and Lady Sinnington were expected ; with squires and dames of all degrees ; and people not distinguished in any particular way had been invited in numbers sufficient to almost fill the terraces and gardens of Ormston.

Both Canon Godfrey and his wife were of opinion that the day was meant to have a special influence upon their niece's decision ; and Mrs. Godfrey did not for a moment doubt what that decision would be. From the first she had thrown all the weight of her own conviction into the scale on the side of the owner of Ormston ; and believed that she had not done so in vain, but her husband had very greatly questioned as to whether the matter was so entirely a foregone conclusion as Mrs. Godfrey appeared to think.

It would soon be seen, however. The eventful day—a day in early August—broke brightly upon the earth. Not a cloud threatened. The far, still sea was shining, studded with the silvery rippling lights that seem to glitter like stars upon a sapphire floor.

All the morning Thorhilda walked about the Rectory gardens, an unread book in her hand ; cool, sweet-scented airs upon her forehead ; perturbing thoughts in her heart—so perturbing they were that she was glad to see Gertrude Douglas come smiling down between the standard roses, the great blue larkspurs, and the golden lilies.

Gertrude was beautifully dressed in primrose cashmere and purple plush. Even Miss Theyn did not know that the costume was a present from her Aunt Milicent to Miss Douglas. Mrs. Godfrey was not a woman who liked to do such things as that with ostentation.

‘Let it be between ourselves, dear,’ she had said to Gertrude. ‘For after all it is a selfish sort of gift. I do so like to see my friends well dressed. And Thorhilda really cares so very little that I often feel quite troubled.’

That had all been said a fortnight ago ; but Miss Douglas had not forgotten it. She came gliding down to the west harbour, conscious of beauty, of a certain indefinable fascination which was neither of the heart nor of the intellect, and yet had force to impress others. There were moments when Thorhilda half resented an impressiveness which she could not comprehend.

‘Not dressed yet ! Why, *my dear* !’ Miss Douglas exclaimed in her high-pitched, yet most musical voice, coming forward to bestow an eager kiss as she spoke. ‘What time do we start ? Four ! Isn’t that late considering the length of the drive ? And, why, what’s the matter ? You look quite doleful ! And on this day of all days of the year ! Well, you *do* surprise me ! If such a party had been given in *my* honour, I should have been dressed hours beforehand, and rehearsing my part in a darkened room, so as to concentrate all my faculties.’

Thorhilda returned her friend’s kiss with a certain emphatic quietness ; and not wishing to discuss the matter alluded to, she



did not disclaim Gertrude's idea as to the intention of the gathering at Ormston Magna.

'A rehearsal in a darkened room?' she said, by way of reply. 'That *does* remind me of poor Aunt Averil, who, for years past, has tried to induce me to give an hour a day to the study of manners. She has a little morocco-bound book, with tinted paper and gilt title, in which she has written an entire code of good manners, with extracts from every book she has ever read bearing at all upon the subject. A fresh acquisition is read out to me each time I go to the Grange. The time before last it was a quotation from "Lothair," to the effect that *repose* was of the essence of beauty; I forget the exact words. Last time the quotation was from Lord Lytton, and urged the larger duty of trying to enter into other people's views, other people's ways of thinking. It was something like this:

"Few there were for whom Harley L'Estrange had not appropriate attraction. Distinguished reputation as soldier and scholar for the grave; whim and pleasantry for the gay; novelty for the sated; and for more vulgar natures was he not Lord L'Estrange?"

'And your Aunt Averil keeps a book of that kind?' said Miss Douglas, with such regard in her mention as she had never shown toward Miss Chalgrove before. 'I do hope she will leave it to you.'

Thorhilda could not help the smile that came—a smile of many meanings. In reply, she said:

'I told Uncle Hugh of our conversation when I came home. He, too, was amused at first. Then he opened a New Testament that was lying near, and for a little while he seemed to be reading, or thinking. Then it was as if he spoke to himself rather than to me; his utterance was disjointed, like one speaking in his sleep:

"There is nothing new under the sun," he said, rising from his chair and walking to and fro slowly in the dim light that was at the farther end of the drawing-room; his hands, still holding the Testament, were crossed behind him, his head was bowed thoughtfully, his voice came sweet and pure and earnest.

"No, there is nothing new," he continued. "The finest refinement of manners cannot go beyond St. Paul—except in one direction only—the manners of his Master. But to remain below these, on the merest human level. Has it not all been said, all that your essayists and novelists and poetical critics of life can bring forward as to the essence of the matter? You are not to think of, you are to *sacrifice self*?—that was said long ago! You are to be all things to all men! St. Paul said, 'I made myself a servant unto all.'"

'And then he went much further, into greater and finer detail. "Only for a moment," he said—"just for one moment, change St. Paul's word '*charity*,' and substitute '*fine manners*!'

"Fine manners are kind; they envy not, they vaunt not; those who have them are not puffed up.



“Fine manners behave in no unseemly way ; the man who is happy enough to possess them does not seek his own. He is not easily provoked. He is not capable of thinking evil.

“He rejoices not in iniquity—no, nor even in hearing of it. His greatest joy is to hear of the good and the true.

“Moreover, the man of fine manners can bear all his sorrows, his trials, in the dignity of silence. If even he should have to bear upon his heart and brain the weight of the wrong-doing of others, he can yet bear without complaint.

“And the secret of all this is simple in the extreme. ‘He believes all things.’ Believing, he can endure in calmness, in joy.

“And yet another event, his fine manners ‘never fail.’ Other things may fail, and cease, and vanish away ; but the man or woman who shall use as his or her pocket-book of etiquette the thirteenth chapter of the First Corinthians shall not be found wanting.

“The man or woman nurtured, trained on the teaching of the New Testament alone, shall be at a loss in no good society. The rules are there ; the disposition to obey the rules is innate. The lowest saint, the humblest follower of Jesus, shall shine in the highest human society that this or any other land can produce.”

So the Canon had spoken one evening, not long before the eventful day to be recorded. And Thorhilda reproduced his words as closely as her memory permitted. Becoming aware that her complacent friend was growing restless, she desisted.

After all the preparations that had been made, it was yet late when the Rectory party started—four of them in Mrs. Godfrey’s pretty light brougham, the remainder in the waggonette. On arriving they saw at once that the lawns and seaward terraces were filled with guests. A band was playing in the shadow of the north end of the house ; tennis-courts had been marked ; a long white tent sheltered the refreshments that were being dispensed by numerous servants, male and female. In the paddock, on the southward side of the house, targets had been set up for archery ; but since the Market Yarburch club was of recent date, no one expected much entertainment from the efforts of its members—and, indeed, just now it was too hot for exertion of any kind. Mrs. Meredith came forward to greet the Rectory party under the shelter of a rose-pink parasol ; her son Percival was by her side, ready to take Thorhilda’s hand as she stepped from the carriage, and yet not forgetful of Mrs. Godfrey or Miss Douglas. No one could find a flaw in his courtesy, now or ever ; but he at once made it evident to everyone that his especial attention that day was to be devoted to Miss Theyn. He had reason enough for being proud of his position. He remained by her side as she shook hands with this group of distinguished guests, and with that, and his approbation of her graceful, reserved courtesousness increased at every step. He noted her perfect ease of manner, her unconscious dignity, her rare and exquisite loveliness, with all the pride of one anticipating the



further pride of possession. All through the afternoon he remained near her, moving with her through the gay crowd, sitting a little apart with her under the shade of the wide beech-trees listening to the band, watching the tennis-players, pointing out to her his rarest and most perfect flowers, waiting upon her lightest word, and doing all with the quiet, eager intention that alone might have betrayed how it was with him. People looked at each other with the look of half-amused intelligence natural at such times; some whispered, some even ventured on a question to Mrs. Meredith, whose pretty gray silk dress seemed to be shining everywhere.

'Is it all fixed? Mayn't we know?' asked Lady Thelton, who was the most intimate of the friends present at Ormston.

But Mrs. Meredith put up her little white hand deprecatingly.

'Oh, hush!' she said. 'I am superstitious. I never talk of a thing until it is beyond the possibility of failure.'

'You superstitious!' laughed Lady Thelton. 'Oh, my dear, what will you accuse yourself of next? But I see; I am to be discreet! Well, give me time to think of a wedding-present worth sending.'

Was Thorhilda conscious of all the wonderings, the surmisings that were going on about her? She hardly knew. She seemed to herself to be more perturbed than happy; more bewildered than content. And yet as the hours went on, swiftly, dreamily, she knew that she was yielding, yielding half against her wish, to the overpowering influence of the emotion that was subduing another so completely that its force, like an electric touch, was communicated to herself. Outwardly as calm, as strong, as dignified as ever, inwardly she felt helpless; and she could make no protest when she knew that she was being gradually and designedly separated from the crowd—drawn by a glance, or less, to a solitary nook between the hillsides, and beyond the gardens, a copse filled with a tangled undergrowth, through which a little beck went trickling and singing down to the sea. Before she knew it, they were alone—she and Percival Meredith; alone and silent—so silent that the note of a bird seemed loud and intrusive, and the gurgling of the water some want of deference on nature's part. For a long while there was no other sound.

## CHAPTER XIX.

### UNDER THE LARCHES.

'A vague unrest  
And a nameless longing filled her breast—  
A wish that she hardly dared to own,  
For something better than she had known.'

J. G. WHITTIER.

PERCIVAL MEREDITH was a man who had sufficient assurance for all the ordinary purposes of life, but he was well enough aware that the present moment was in no sense an ordinary one. Yet he



wondered a little at the strength of the emotion that was besetting him ; it was new and strange. Though he had known love before, or something that he had counted for love, he had never till now felt this almost hesitancy that held him in its grasp. It was not till he had made the effort of recalling the facts that Mrs. Godfrey had given him all the encouragement that a woman in her position could give ; that the Canon had shown him a kindly welcome at all times, whilst Miss Theyn herself had never exhibited the faintest distaste, or seemed other than pleased by his presence—it was not till he had recollected these things with some vigour that he began to regain the standpoint natural to him. Even now it was not easy, and Thorhilda was not making anything easier for him.

She stood leaning against the trunk of a young larch-tree, straight and whit and still, even a little sad now, if her expression were any true index of her feeling, and yet to Percival Meredith's thinking she had never looked more beautiful. Her white cashmere dress fell into graceful folds, and mingled with soft, creamy lace and loopings and floatings of ribbon and borderings of plush. The only ornament she wore was a Niphetos rose, which he himself had gathered for her and given to her earlier in the afternoon.

'It was good of you to wear my rose,' he said at last, speaking in a low voice, and lifting his long dark eyelashes in a certain languid yet effective way peculiarly his own. Thorhilda blushed under his gaze, but faintly, and with as much consciousness of disturbance as of pleasure, yet the beautiful soft, sea-shell pink made her seem lovelier than ever in his sight, and, half unconsciously, he drew a little nearer to her side.

'But all you do is good and kind,' he continued. 'It is that gives me hope, and that only. Though I have watched you, tried to make myself something to you, some part of your life, these two years past, I must admit that I have yet no assurance. One moment, nay, perhaps for a whole evening, I have felt more or less happy, because I fancied you had given me more or less ground for hoping that you were beginning to care for me. Then, perhaps the very next evening, you have taken the ground from under my feet. Can you wonder that I have often known something like despair? That for a long time past I have felt as if I *must* know what the end was to be—whether I was to hope for a whole long life of happiness, or for a life of something more nearly like misery than I dared to think. . . . Lately the suspense has been growing terribly. Can you not imagine it? Can you not sympathize with it—at least so far as to say that I may hope that you will soon put an end to it—the end I yearn for? . . . You can never, never destroy my one earthly hope !'

While Percival was speaking, naturally enough Thorhilda was thinking, thinking rapidly, feeling intensely, as people do when the heart and brain are raised to their highest and swiftest power by the rush of the fresh force of life through vein and nerve. And here she found the good of much previous right thought, high desire,



and frequent prayer. Even in this impetuous moment she said to herself, 'I cannot have lived under the same roof with my uncle Hugh for nothing, and surely now, if ever, I must strive to see the right. . . . Would that I had openly asked him about this before, talked it over with him! . . . I must do it, I must do it yet before I give any definite answer. . . . Yes, I must request time for that!'

Not once did it occur to her—how should it, in her youth, her inexperience of love, life, all things?—that a perfect affection, perfect within itself, would have needed no outward constraint, no external drawing or pressure, no help of any kind.

But meantime, while she was thinking, Percival Meredith was moved to pouring out a very rhapsody of loving, pleading words, less preconsidered than those he had used before. Thorhilda had not dreamed that he could be so eloquent, so impressive, so fervent! It was her perception of this latter quality that drew her to be real also.

'I did not know, indeed I did not, that you cared for me so much,' Thorhilda replied with timid simplicity, trembling, blushing, feeling so faint under the weight of new and strong emotion, that she longed to lean upon the strength of the man who seemed so all-sufficient for her support, then and after. What was it restrained her? She could not do it. Despite her weakness, her almost yearning and tender weakness, she shrank from self-betrayal. 'I cannot answer,' she said at last. 'I cannot give you any answer now!'

She stopped. Percival took her hand, holding it gently, as one who would quiet the fear betrayed. It was some time before he began to plead again.

'*Not one word?*' he said at last, '*not one single word?* It is all I ask. . . . And, no, I will not ask even that, if it is to cost you so much. How could I ask anything from you but that you should not forbid me to wait? I will wait as long as you wish, only do not say that I may not hope. At least, at the very least, say that I may hope that you will be good to me some day! . . . I wish you knew how I long to be *something* to you, to be in a position to—to save you from anything that might happen in the future. . . . And—and we none of us know!'

Thorhilda was only half aware of the sudden restraint that came over Percival Meredith. Of the reason for it, for the sudden drooping of the eyes, the unexpected failure of the words of the man she was, or seemed to be, on the verge of loving with her whole life's love, she knew nothing.

How should she know? There had been whispers abroad of the Canon's unrestrained and unconsidered generosity; of family claims, the claims of younger brothers, with their wives and little ones; poor, unenterprising, clamorous; but of all this Thorhilda had known nothing, and therefore had thought nothing. Once or twice it had struck her as a little strange that her Aunt Milicent should seem to be so emphatically on the side of early marriages.



'I might have thought she wished me to leave her,' Thorhilda had said to herself more than once in moments of perplexity ; but no such ungracious and ungrateful ideas had remained with her permanently. And no thought of this kind had any weight with her now. She was only conscious of a strong desire to avoid the utterance of anything that should seem to be binding upon her afterward.

And yet, even in this troubled moment, she felt that she must some time yield. Half she feared that she would do this, and half she hoped that she might be compelled by some circumstance outside herself to do it.

But even now she did not recognise the fact that no hesitation ought to have been possible to her—no, not for a moment. A true and healthy human love knows no more of hesitation as to whether it shall betray itself, than a healthy human life knows of hesitation as to whether it shall go on living. If a test were wanting, here is one ready-made for most uses.

But Miss Theyn was fully conscious of her perplexity ; and, as was natural to her upright spirit, she confessed it.

'I cannot, I cannot understand it,' Percival Meredith said in reply ; speaking with a new and moving humility, that was yet not untempered with self-respect. 'I cannot understand. You either care for me, or you do not ! . . . Yet forgive me ! As I said just now, I am most willing to wait, only, only tell me why I must wait ? Will you not tell me that ?'

A moment Thorhilda was silent. Then all at once, as it were, her spirit broke from the bewilderment that had held her as in a trance all the afternoon. She lifted her face, raised her beautiful gray eyes, which were deeply charged with all earnestness, all sincerity.

'I will answer you plainly,' she said, speaking with far less of trepidation in her manner than she felt within herself. 'I will tell you the truth so far as I can. And the first thing I must say is that I have no doubt of your affection for me. . . .'

'Then thank you for that, a thousand times thank you !' Percival broke in with fervidness, and raising Thorhilda's hand to his lips gracefully as he spoke. 'Again and again I thank you for your faith in me. . . . But having admitted so much, what can hinder you now ? Not your want of love for me. Once more I say that I will wait for that. I will try to win that ! With all my heart I will try ! . . . And what is there beside ?—nothing, surely nothing.'

What was there in all this ready protestation that seemed, if not unreal, yet still in some curious way unsatisfactory ? Was it the way of men ? of lovers ? The inquiries that Thorhilda put to herself were utterly childlike in their ignorance, their confusion. She had had no lover before, nor any dream of love. How should she know ?

Yet she replied gravely, and with an altogether womanly dignity.

'There is much beside,' she said, and then there was a pause while



she made an effort to continue. 'If I am sure of you, or of your affection rather, I am not sure of myself, not in any way. *I am fearing myself—my own integrity*; and I think that you should know of this!'

'Your integrity—yours!' exclaimed Percival, feeling at least as much surprised as he seemed. 'What *can* you mean? I should as soon doubt the integrity of an angel from heaven.'

'I mean this,' Thorhilda said, her breath coming and going heavily, her eyes set with a seeming hardness in the expression of them, as if the effort after a perfect straightforwardness were testing her strength to the utmost limit—'I mean this, that I am not sure that I return your affection, or that I ever can return it as it should be returned. I fear much that I never can. And, let me speak the truth in all sincerity, I *know* that I am tempted by your position, by the prospect you have to offer me—the prospect of ease, of wealth, of unlimited luxury for all my future life. I have been used to these things, though they are not mine by birthright; and now it seems to me that I could not well live without them. . . . And, as I fancied you suggested just now, I may not be able to live at the Rectory always. . . . And there is nowhere else—nowhere.'

The silence, the utter silence that followed, was not one to be forgotten. For some moments Percival Meredith could make no reply; and yet he hardly knew what it was that hindered him so powerfully, so completely.

In his own heart he had long ago admitted to himself that in all probability worldly considerations would have some influence with Miss Theyn, more with her friends; and the idea had not hurt him grievously.

Now he was conscious of pain, of disappointment, of disillusionment; and though he could not analyze his feeling, he was aware that he stood as one watching the visible shattering of some idol he had set up to worship; and being not greatly given to such worshipping, the loss seemed all the greater.

Miss Theyn began to perceive in a slight degree.

'I have grieved you,' she said sorrowfully, gently. 'Forgive me. I thought it better to be honest, quite honest.'

'Yes,' Percival replied musingly. 'Yes, perhaps it was. And yet, I wish you had spared me!'

Again there was silence. Somewhere beyond the distant purple of the tree-tops the sun was sinking to the moor; twilight was stealing into the hollow; the rippling of the streamlet seemed to sink to a sadder, a less living tone.

'Let us forget this,' Percival said at last. 'You have not said that you could not care for me; and I think you will learn to care at least for my kindness, my love—the rest will come. I do hope and believe that it will come. I trust the future.'

'The rest!' It had never been so near coming as it was at that moment. Percival Meredith, a little saddened, a little unhopeful.



and subdued to a new humility, was very different from the self-assured man who had put aside every thought of failure, and had not been able, for all his diplomacy, to quite hide the fact that he had done so. Now he had nothing to hide ; and it may have been that one more kindly and earnest appeal would have been answered to his wish. But that appeal was not made ; and it may be admitted that there was reason enough why it should not. He was hurt, and reasonably, and one sign of it was the touch of petulance about his small, restrained mouth ; another sign was the want of perseverance at the one significant moment.

‘I will go on hoping,’ he said, turning to go, and cleaving a way through the briars for Miss Theyn to pass. ‘And you will be good to me ; say that you will ?’

Thorhilda smiled.

‘Haven’t I always been good ?’ she said, holding out her hand timidly, half reluctantly.

‘Yes ; indeed you have !’ Percival replied. ‘As I said before, that was the only excuse I had for my presumption.’

## CHAPTER XX.

### THE CANON AND HIS NIECE.

‘To thine own self be true ;  
And it shall follow, as the night the day,  
Thou canst not then be false to any man.’

MISS THEYN was not quite happy that evening—how should she be ? She was confused herself ; circumstance was confusing ; and there seemed no light—no help anywhere. On the way home from Ormston Magna, Gertrude Douglas indulged in a little mild badinage, which was quickly repressed. The Canon was thoughtful, absorbed. When Mrs. Godfrey came to know, from the lips of Percival Meredith himself, that Thorhilda’s answer had been vague, and not altogether encouraging, an unusual but most visible flush of anger mounted to her forehead, and remained there. Thorhilda saw and understood ; and having hitherto seen so little of any unquiet side there might be to her aunt’s character, the sight added to her perplexity.

It was some time before the two women spoke to each other of the great event of the day ; and then nothing passed that was helpful in any way. Mrs. Godfrey knew more than Thorhilda knew of the reasons why Percival Meredith’s offer should have been graciously accepted, and she was too much a woman of the world not to prize to the uttermost the advantages that Thorda seemed quite willing, and quite unthinkingly, to forego for very indifference. This was how the matter seemed to the Canon’s wife : the Canon himself saw much farther.

‘Surely you would not force her inclination in any way ?’ he had said, after listening to the torrent of words his wife had poured



out in his ear while they were dressing for dinner, the door between their rooms being open for this especial purpose; and Mrs. Godfrey's reply was one that he could only meet with a pained silence. Yet he was by no means insensible to the worldly advantages offered to his neice—nay, for reasons known in all their seriousness only to himself, he would have been at least as glad as his wife had been if Thorhilda had chosen to accept without demur the offer of the owner of Ormston Magna. Yet that she should be even by one word *persuaded*, was repugnant to every notion of honour that he had.

Later in the evening, seizing a brief opportunity, he could not but speak to the girl, whose white, and lovely, and lonely face seemed to be appealing to all the tenderness, all the manliness he had in his soul.

'Tell me about it, Thorda,' he said, laying a gentle kindly hand upon his niece's shoulder as she sat musing sadly by the drawing-room fire. Mrs. Godfrey had retired early, being wearied with the inquietude of her own spirit, and of the day's event. 'Tell me about it,' he said. 'I know the outside facts. You could not say "Yes," not conscientiously.'

'No, I could not,' Thorhilda said, letting a single sob escape in spite of all repression. A weaker woman as much perturbed, as much excited, would have answered with a burst of tears. 'No; that is just it. But to tell the truth I can hardly say where the conscientiousness lies. I am afraid of being dishonest—dishonest toward him or with myself.'

'You have never at any time felt that your mind was made up at all on this matter?'

'No; not for more than five minutes together. . . . Shall I tell you the truth, Uncle Hugh—all the truth? I should like to be mistress of Ormston Magna—I should like it much. In one sense it seems the very place in the world made for me to fill.'

'That is just how it has seemed to me,' replied the Canon. 'You have every quality that would be required—every grace. . . . And I had hoped long ago that it might come to pass. But my hope has limitations. Now, tell me the rest!'

'There is no rest! I like Mr. Meredith, as you know; but not, I think, with the liking I ought to have before I can accept the position he wishes me to fill. . . . He says that this is but natural; but just what he expected; and that all the rest will come. It is here that my trouble lies. As you know, I have hardly known—hardly ever seen anyone else. And at one time I am drawn to him; at another time almost repelled, without any reason for either. . . . I cannot understand!'

The Canon was watching, listening; his inmost heart was lifted up for the One light, the One strength, the One guidance that could come to him.

'Have you no word for me, Uncle Hugh—no help?' And as Thorhilda spoke she laid her white, beseeching hand gently upon



his arm. 'I am no heroine,' she said. 'I want to do right, but I have not even self-knowledge enough to enable me to know what is right. Can't you help me? . . . I have never needed help so much before.'

The unintended touch of pathos in her voice moved the Canon greatly. He turned to Thorhilda with all the warmth of one to whom the unrealized idea of fatherhood was inexpressibly dear.

'I will help you all I can,' he said soothingly. 'I have been blind myself—at least it seems so to me now. And let me say, whilst I have opportunity, that I have not done all for you that I should have done. I could not. I had other claims, hidden from the world's sight, for the most part, but binding to the uttermost. Your claim was binding also; I knew that all the while. I am realizing it rather bitterly now. And it may be too late; I cannot tell! And I fear—I fear much that I counted on your making such a marriage as would quiet all my care for you, at once and for ever. Therefore you see how it is that I cannot urge you to think more favourably of Percival Meredith than your own inclination moves you to do. Under other circumstances I might have pointed out to you much that is good in him, and also the possibility of your influence heightening the good qualities he already has. As matters stand I cannot do this—not without suspecting myself. And, indeed, at present I can advise nothing but waiting—prayerful waiting. . . . Try that, Thorda dear—*prayer*. There is no other help for this human world. And when light comes, *be true to it!* That is all that I can say. Be true to the light given, wherever it may lead!'

## CHAPTER XXI.

THAT WAS THE DAY WE LOVED, THE DAY WE MET.

'The love which soonest responds to love—even what we call "love at first-sight"—is the surest love; and for this reason—that it does not depend upon any one merit or quality, but embraces in its view the whole being. That is the love which is likely to last—incomprehensible, indefinable, unarguable-about.'—SIR ARTHUR HELPS: *Brevia*.

THERE was no one to counsel, to strengthen Barbara Burdas. If she stood up straight and strong, she stood somewhat apart from those who surrounded her more immediately. And it said as much for their human insight as for her tact that no one seemed to resent her position. If any did a kindly thing for her, the doer knew certainly that in his or her place Bab would have done as much or more.

It is so that many of us accept kindnesses which unsupported pride might rise up to reject. We take them as they are meant, knowing that our own meaning would have led us to the same outward expression. 'You shall do this for me if you will, because in your position I should have wished to do the same for you.' So we



reply to ourselves when a false dignity with all its suspiciousness would spoil the moment.

All her life Bab's place among her fellows had been an easy one. She had been admired without jealousy, commended without bitterness, respected without undertone of detraction. Even when her pride, her independence offended, her large kindness of heart made quick atonement.

So it was that no one resented the fact that she had been chosen by the artist to be the principal figure of his great picture, 'The Resting-place of the Flither-pickers.' Bab was to be in the foreground, just rising up from a brief rest, her basket of limpets on her head, Ailsie clinging by her side, and bearing her little basketful of bait. Half a dozen others were to be seated upon the rocks and stones of the mid-distance.

Miss Theyn had heard of the picture, though, as a rule, she heard little of anything concerning the fisher-folk of the Bight. She might have known quite as much of their innermost life had she lived at York or at Lancaster. It is the stranger who is curious and interested where the resident is indifferent and supine.

It was on the morrow after that unsatisfactory hour at Ormston Magna that Miss Theyn went down to Ulvstan to do some shopping for Mrs. Godfrey, and to make one or two calls in her aunt's name on some of the more prominent parishioners. At Mrs. Squire's, the milliner's shop, she had been so unfortunate as to meet her Aunt Katherine, and though this was only for one moment, Mrs. Kerne had seized the opportunity of making the moment as bitter as might be. Thorhilda bore the small unmerited sneers with outward calmness, but with more of inward irritation than she was accustomed to feel—an irritation that added to the things she was already bearing. When the morning's work she was done she dismissed the carriage. 'Wait for me at the Cross Roads,' she said to Woodward. 'I shall not be long.' Then turning down the steep street that led to the beach and to the Forecliff, she half admitted to herself that she was in search of some distraction that had no name.

'Where am I going, and why?' she asked vaguely, not demanding any answer from herself. It seemed as if the blueness of the sapphire sea alone had power to urge her onward, as if the soothing sound of the wavelets falling and breaking upon the beach alone could impel her to watch, to listen, to pause upon the brink of that river of life upon which she stood. She seemed to be filled with a strange hopefulness as she went onward over the beach, threading her way daintily among the tangle-covered stones on either hand. As she went onward, the sea-breezes blowing upon her face, the shrill cry of the gulls in her ear, she seemed to lose the tremulous sense of the painfulness of human life that had held her so strongly before. A new warmth grew about her heart, a new peacefulness, which made all the future seem plain and easy. Mere physical movement seemed a delightful and pleasant thing.



Was it the sunshine that inspired her and allured her? She went slowly by the edge of the wavelets that rounded the sparkling sea, which was retreating for awhile from the Bight of Ulvstan, moving gracefully, as to some rhythm, unheard and unknown. By-and-by it would advance again to the singing of the morning stars, joining its music to theirs, helping to complete the cosmic harmony.

Thorhilda's mood was quiet and sweet, yet there was yearning in it; and the smile that was on her face as she rounded the point of Yarva Ness might certainly have been counted a smile of expectancy. She was looking out dreamily, half unconsciously, as people sometimes do who walk alone, and then, quite suddenly, she became aware that she was not alone. There was a large white umbrella, an easel, a wide canvas; an artist with a big gray felt sombrero was bending over a palette, over a sheaf of brushes, making rapid touches, as he glanced to where Barbara Burdas stood, with little Ailsie beside her, among the weed-hung boulders of the Bight. Beyond were the tall cliffs, half hidden by the yellow sunshiny mist, that made the scene like the coast-line of some dreamland or wonderland. Miss Theyn saw none of these details definitely as she went onward with a smile toward Barbara, who stood there, tall, beautiful, almost as dignified as Miss Theyn herself. For a moment she forgot all about the artist, and lifted her creel from her head, without dreaming that the slight action was one to move him almost to despair. Yet he stood by with grave face and courteous attitude, wondering what his next duty might be. He was not so free from perturbation as he seemed. He had forgotten Bab's description, his own anticipation, yet all at once he knew himself to be possessed by that flash of feeling which arouses most of us when at last we stand in the presence of a long felt-after ideal. Here at last is the beauty we have tried to grasp in visions, here is the goodness, here the grace of soul. Being thus prepared we fall down and worship, and are at once the better for that worship.

Rudel knew when the pilgrims brought from the East the accounts of the grace, the loveliness, the goodness of the Lady of Tripoli. He listened till he lost himself, lost himself utterly in the hope to find another. But the story of the troubadour having been told already it may not be repeated here. Browning's brief poem contains the essence of the drama, its most vital human meaning. The man heard and loved, loved so intensely that when the moment came when sight was to be vouchsafed to him his strength was not sufficient for the ordeal; it had been consumed by thought, lit by a supreme imagination. He fell at the feet of the woman whom he had loved unseen, and he died there. Ever since men have sneered at his name, or have grown sadder on hearing it. A few men, a few women, have understood.

Damian Aldenmede had not the poem in remembrance at the moment when he turned to meet the diffident, almost timid glance



of the lady of whom he had heard so much. Bab, in her own informal yet unembarrassed way, was introducing this new Lady of Tripoli or of Ulvstan. What's in a name? The Rudel of the hour stood holding his brushes and palette in one hand, raising his gray felt hat with the other, lifting a grave, unsmiling, austere face, with far-seeing eyes, that seemed so full of sadness, of some old hopelessness, that Miss Theyn's one impression was that of a man acquainted with sorrow, and with little beside. Later she knew more, and judged far otherwise.

She was the first to speak.

'I fear I have interrupted you,' she said, in sweet, musical, yet most unaffected tones. 'I ought not to have stopped, but I could hardly help it.'

As she ended her speech she glanced first at the canvas, then at Bab, with undisguised admiration. Bab was listening to her, wondering how her words, her voice, her grace, her beauty would strike this most perceptive artist, who was now disclaiming all idea of being interrupted.

'It is good to have a brief rest sometimes,' he was saying. 'And I am proud that my picture tempted you to stay and look at it. I only wish that it had been in a more attractive stage.'

'To me it is very attractive,' Miss Theyn replied eagerly. 'I have not seen an unfinished picture half a dozen times in my life. . . . I find great charm about a canvas only half-covered.'

'Do you paint yourself?'

'No, I regret to say. I learnt to draw, as people do learn for whom drawing is classed with crewel work. My governess taught me. I did a drawing every month, the usual chalk trees, the usual chalk figures, with the usual river impeded by large stones. The only variation was in the ruins, sometimes it was a ruined castle, sometimes a church, sometimes a mill. There was a trick of touch for each.'

'And you learnt the receipt by heart?'

'I learnt it thoroughly. When I had done so I laid down my porte-crayon for ever.'

'Surely not? . . . It is not too late to make up for lost time.'

Bab, who was listening closely, and with intense interest, was not aware of the quiet smile that was creeping unnoticed over her own face.

'Is he always wantin' to learn somebody something?' she asked herself. And truth to say she had hit rather cleverly upon one of the singularities of his character. It was not that he liked teaching in itself, nay, it would hardly be too much to say that he hated it; yet the pleasure of knowing that he had satisfied another's craving for knowledge, or even for mere information, was one of the most satisfactory pleasures remaining to him in life.

Not that he was dreaming of offering lessons in drawing to Miss Theyn; nor had Thorhilda's vision progressed so far as yet. Still she was silent for a moment; and during that moment she was



thinking of the possibility of taking up an art that would require time, labour and earnest thought. Then her future, as it had been placed before her only yesterday, rose up all at once, making her feel as one awaking from a pleasant dream to the dull and chill reality of daily life. The smile seemed to die from her lips and from her eyes. Damian Aldenmede, watching her closely, eagerly, saw, and . . . grievously misunderstood.

'She thinks I am presuming—this dainty lady. . . . I will be mindful! . . . She shall think so no more!'

Thorhilda replied at last—speaking in quite another tone.

'I am afraid it is too late,' she said, watching the artist as he began to rearrange his brushes, to replenish his palette from the tubes. She discerned the change in him, the increase of gravity, the power of self-effacement; and above all she saw the loneliness, the true heart-loneliness that has outworn all waiting, all searching, all hoping. Seeing that he was wishful to begin his work again, she said a few more words to Bab, gave a smile and a kiss to Ailsie, and turned to go.

There was no embarrassment visible in her manner as she bowed to the artist, saying gracefully, but not without an undertone of sadness:

'Good-morning, Mr. Aldenmede. Thank you much for letting me see your picture. I am sure it will be a very beautiful one.'

'Will he ask me to come and see it when it is done?' was the question in her own heart.

'Shall I say that I shall be glad if she will come and see it many times before the finishing touch is given?' was the question asked on the other side.

Neither interrogation was uttered aloud, though perhaps the inward thought did not stray so very wildly. Miss Theyn went back over the beach alone, perhaps sadder than before, and with a strange and utterly unaccountable sadness. Yet she felt as if all at once a new restfulness had overshadowed her.

'How quiet he makes one feel!' she said to herself, speaking as she might have spoken of one whom she had known for years. 'Is it the strength in him? the goodness? I am sure he is good; and I am sure that he is strong. . . . There is nothing frivolous there! nothing selfish, nothing idle, nothing that could even tolerate luxuriousness.' . . . Then there was a pause—a graver moment. 'And there is nothing that could savour for one second of secrecy, of duplicity. If he is reserved, it is with the reserve of one who would hide from the world's eyes a sorrow that the world could never understand. . . . If I had a trouble, I could tell it to him; he would comprehend, he would alleviate it somehow. . . . I wish, I wish he had not been—what he is!'

Even in thought Miss Theyn could not put any words to her vague ideas of this stranger's poverty; she shrank from her own notion, and felt curiously perplexed. That one who had a more true distinction of manner, a more perfect grace of address, a finer



reticence in speech and demeanour than she had ever seen before—that such a one should be lodging at Mrs. Featherstone's, a small, tidy cottage at the back of the Forecliff; that he should seem to be dependent upon his brush; that he should have come into the neighbourhood of the east of North Yorkshire without credentials of any kind, was assuredly bewildering. Yet Miss Theyn's utmost vision did not pass beyond his own presentment of himself. 'Yet I wish—I wish he had been different,' she repeated half audibly. 'I know no one whom I should be so glad to have as a friend. All my life I shall think of him as the one man between whom and myself there might have been a perfect friendship.'

Meanwhile the artist had resumed his painting with redoubled vigour—working rapidly, silently, eagerly; and Bab saw by the compression about his mouth that he was in no mood for conversation. It was not till he had flung down his brushes and palette and patted Ailsie on the cheek, with thanks for being so still, giving her a bright new florin for her very own, that Bab dared to speak.

There was a touch of humour in her blue eyes when she raised them.

'Noo—did Ah tell ya wrong?' she asked, speaking gently and smiling softly. 'Did Ah saäy a word overmuch? Have ya ever in yer whole life seen a lady *half* so beautiful?'

Aldenmede did not reply for a moment. Then, laying his hand gently on little Ailsie's shoulder, and turning to Bab with his kindest voice and accent, he said, using much emphasis:

'Don't misunderstand me, Barbara—indeed, I feel sure that you will not! . . . But how shall I say it? how shall I express what I am thinking—that it will be better that . . . better if you do not speak to me of Miss Theyn any more.'

Bab's only answer was a quick, curious, wondering look. As she went homeward, she smiled to herself, saying:

'He'll speak of her to me afore I'll speak of her to him! But he'll do that, an' afore long, or my naäme's noän Barbara Burdas.'

## CHAPTER XXII.

### IN YARVA WYKE.

'And we entreat Thee, that all men whom Thou  
Hast gifted with great minds may love Thee well,  
And praise Thee for their powers, and use them most  
Humbly and holily, and, lever-like,  
Act but in lifting up the mass of mind  
About them.'

P. J. BAILEY: *Festus*.

THE summer was passing on—a bright beautiful summer it was, with now and then a summer storm by way of variation, tossing up the white waves into Ulvstan Bight, scattering the herring-fleet north and south; now and then a sea-fret, chilling yet stifling,



defrauding the sight as with a temporary blindness. Yet the actors in the drama of life, as life was displayed on the stage of Ulvstan Bight, went on playing their parts all the same, apparently heedless of storm or shine. Some were bearing patiently, suffering silently; some now and then flew out into mad street brawls, subsiding afterward to hide their misery, cowering by fires of shipwreck wood, seeming to cease from emotion altogether, and only to cling in a dumb brute-like way to the mere fact of existence.

Canon Godfrey, going in and out amongst them, was touched afresh each day by the endurance he saw. Misery was accepted as natural thing, as natural as labour or pain; and oft he marvelled to see how such as were suffering most seemed best to bear the contrast that was daily increasing before their eyes.

It was in the early autumn that the richer people came to Ulvstan, the people who brought their own carriages, their own man-servants and maid-servants. The resources of the neighbourhood were taxed to provide for their wants, or what were counted as wants; the little shops grew quite enterprising in their efforts; the scene on the beach grew daily more and more gay. Ladies on horseback came galloping up and down by the rippling tide; invalids in chairs and carriages were drawn to and fro more slowly; little brown-holland children with pails and spades went paddling in and out of pools and sand-castles; crimson parasols burned in the yellow sunshine; pink dresses and blue, white dresses and red, went flitting about among the bathing-machines; and the fisher-folk looked on, and wondered, and did little kindnesses whenever opportunity came in their way with a curious and not unbeautiful acceptance of the inevitable.

'Good God! that one can bear to see it all, and to think of it!' the Canon said to himself one morning, as he walked with his wife in search of Thorhilda, who had gone toward the Forecliff with a basket of flowers for Barbara Burdas, and had not returned to the place where they had expected her.

She had meant to leave them at the Sagged House; but she had found the door locked; and Nan Tyas, passing by at the moment, had stopped to say:

'Is it Bab ya're wantin'? She's noän i' the hoose; she seldom is at this time o' daäy.'

There was a pertness in Nan's manner, as she leaned over the gate and lifted her bold black eyes, that aroused within the Rector's niece a touch of something that was almost indignation.

'Thank you!' Miss Theyn replied. 'Perhaps you know where I may find her?'

'Perhaps!' Nan admitted, evidently resenting the momentary haughtiness her own manner had awakened. 'Perhaps Ah do! Ah'm noän boun' te saäy, sa far as I understand the law o' the land!'

Thorhilda's first impulse was to pass onward, without so much as a civil word of departure; but she had force enough to recover



herself. Turning to Nan, who still stood with her elbow upon the gate-post and an unpleasant smile upon her lip, she said quietly, and with dignity :

‘Has it so happened that I have offended you in some way? Have I been so unfortunate as to displease you, to cross your will or wish in any direction? Pardon my questions; but you seem to speak as if you had some reason for wishing not to oblige me.’

Nan stared for a moment into the pale, gentle, yet resolute face before her. The kindly expression answering her own insolent one was puzzling. Nan could not resent it.

‘Ah doänt know as *you’ve* ever vexed me,’ she said, averting her face slightly, partly in embarrassment, partly in shame. ‘But if Ah *mun* tell the truth, you’re near anuff akin te them ’at hes.’

Miss Theyn began to understand; and in spite of effort after self-control the understanding brought a flush of pain to her cheek.

‘I am not quite sure that I know what you mean,’ she replied, speaking in changed tones, yet still with a kindly and winning courtesy. ‘You will know that I cannot speak to you of—of others. . . . If you cannot tell me where Barbara is, I will say “Good-morning.”’

‘Good-morning,’ Nan retorted, lifting herself from the gate-post and moving away. But she turned again quickly, Miss Theyn’s word and tone constraining her. ‘Ah meant noä offence,’ she said, ‘an’ mebbe Ah’d better gie ya a word o’ warnin’. They mean mischief—some o’ Dave’s mates. . . . But, there, Ah can saäy no more.’

‘Stay a moment!’ Miss Theyn entreated. ‘Mischief, you say? To whom? Not to Barbara—surely not to her?’

‘To Bab? Noä, niver! They’ll noän harm her! But there’s others—there’s one ya know, not so far away by kin. Give him a word. If he’s not a fool, he’ll take it.’

‘You are meaning my brother?’

‘Ah niver naämed no naämes,’ Nan replied, half tremulously, and again turning to depart. ‘It’s well anuff known i’ the Bight ’at Dave’s heart’s been set upon her for years past; an’ there’s noän but what thinks she’d ha’ given in sooner or later if nobody else had come between. An’ they know how it is! They can see that his heart’s just breakin’; and hers is noän so much at rest. They can see it all; an’ they’ve said . . . But, oh me! What am Ah doin’? They’d murder me—toss me over the cliff-edge as soon as look at me if they knew Ah’d betrayed ’em! Eh, me, I is a fool! . . . But you’ll noän let on, Miss Theyn?’

‘Can you not trust me?’ Thorhilda asked, her face alight with gratitude, with sympathy, with kindness.

‘Trust *you*? Ay, to the death! But let ma go noo. Ah darn’t stay no longer.’

Miss Theyn was left standing there by the steps of the Sagged House, perplexed, wondering, irresolute. Then all at once her mind was made up. She would find Barbara first, and then go on at once to Garlaff. Doubtless the fisher-girl would be on the Scaur some-



where—in all probability at the point beyond Yarva Ness where the artist was at work upon his picture. Miss Theyn could see the white umbrella gleaming even from the Forecliff ; and at once she began to make her way thither, though not without some reluctance—a reluctance she herself could hardly understand.

She had not seen the artist since that day when Bab had, in her own simple and unembarrassed way, introduced him to her. More than once her uncle had seen him at church, and subsequently had called upon him at his lodging ; and unfortunately the call had been returned one afternoon when the whole of the Rectory party had gone to Danesborough. Naturally, a stranger of such distinguished presence and bearing had been discussed at the house on the hill at Yarchurgh.

‘We must see him somehow’ Mrs. Godfrey had said one evening, not thinking how and where they were to meet.

It was Barbara who was the first to discern Miss Theyn’s approach. She was standing in the usual position some two or three yards away from the artist, her creel on her head, little Ailsie by her side. Mr. Aldenmede saw by the sudden change on her face that some one was coming—some one in whom his model was interested.

‘Who is it?’ he said, smiling. ‘Miss Theyn?’

Bab looked at him, and only the word ‘roguish’ could perfectly describe the meaning of her glance.

‘Ah thought that were a name ’at had been forbidden to be said,’ she remarked, her expression saving her speech from all touch of temper.

The artist looked up with quick appreciation. There was no time for words. Miss Theyn’s step was upon the gravel behind him. He rose and bowed. Bab saw his colour change, and the carnation that was on Miss Theyn’s face deepened to an almost painful degree. The words of greeting were curiously confused.

Thorhilda offered the basket of flowers to Barbara—rich and rare roses, heliotrope, stephanotis, sweet verbenas, half buried in daintiest ferns. Bab took them with an emotion that betrayed to each of the on-lookers that her soul’s sensitiveness to beauty was not to be measured by any of the outward circumstances of her life. She turned away, silent, tremulous, to hide the basket from the sun within the cave close at hand.

Miss Theyn was looking at the picture ; Damian Aldenmede was explaining his further intention concerning it ; while little Ailsie was resting on his campstool, her small hand clasped in his. The artist knew himself to have already a singular affection for this tiny child of seven, and that she responded to it helped to fill the lonely days with a quite new and felicitous warmth. He was glad that she was there while Miss Theyn was speaking.

‘Have you not been working very hard?’ she asked, looking at his canvas, upon which the figures were growing—coming to a fuller life, a finer beauty, a truer human expressiveness. Her question



sounded common-place ; her well-meant grain the veriest chaff ; yet no other word would come.

The artist smiled in answer. Then he said :

‘That is true in one sense, yet one never counts the work *hard* that is done *con amore*. The hardness would be in being deprived of the opportunity of working. I do not think that in the intellectual life of man there can be a greater trial than to know that you have something to say or do, and to learn by sad and sore experience that the opportunity of uttering your word or doing your deed is to be for ever denied you.’ Then the man’s voice changed, faltered a little as he continued : ‘If there be a true taking up of a bitter cross it is known to the man who must do some lower work while his whole soul is drawn to live and to toil on greater heights. And it is a trial that not one human being in a thousand can comprehend ; therefore the man who suffers it can have no sympathy, hope for none. In the beginning he yearns for it, throwing out feelers here and there, as if searching after response, comprehension ; but by-and-by, borne down by sheer disappointment, he ceases to expect these things, and schools himself to a life of silent uncomprehended negation, knowing that he does this to his own loss, perhaps to the world’s loss also. Everything has its price.’

Had the man forgotten himself ? All at once he seemed to wake up.

‘I beg your pardon !’ he said emphatically. ‘I fear I was not thinking !’

But he saw that Miss Theyn was thinking as she stood there silent, impressed, beside his picture, looking into it with quite new vision. Bab was coming back from the cool cave where she had left her flowers, something glittering among the petals that was not the morning dew. She was by Ailsie’s side again, the little one was lifting her disengaged hand to Bab, Miss Theyn was smiling at the evidence of affection that was between the two, when all at once everybody became aware of a figure, leaping, sliding, gliding, making for himself a pathway down the pathless cliff but just beyond Yarva Ness.

Involuntarily the artist was drawn to look at Miss Theyn. She was pallid, trembling, distressed.

‘It is Hartas, my brother,’ she said ; then she turned aside. If some madness were moving him to self-destruction she would not look on while the deed was being done.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

### CANON GODFREY AND HIS NEPHEW.

‘For worse than being fool’d  
Of others, is to fool one’s self.’

TENNYSON : *Gareth and Lynette*.

It seemed like a miracle that Hartas Theyn should make that perilous descent, and yet touch the beach unhurt. Thorhilda, turn-



ing to meet him, saw that he was white and rigid to the very lips. He looked thinner than he had looked before ; and his dark eyes, as he looked from one to another of the little group before him, seemed alight with new and strange fires. So impressive his unexpected presence was that no one spoke for a moment. At last Thorhilda broke the silence :

‘This is my brother, Mr. Aldenmede,’ she said, making a great effort after self-command. Then, turning to Hartas, she exclaimed : ‘How could you do such a thing as that ? How *could* you ? . . . It seemed impossible that you should ever reach the foot of the cliff alive !’

‘There’s more than one here that would have been glad anuff if I never had reached it alive !’ he replied with ill-controlled emotion. ‘But I didn’t come down here to talk about myself,’ he went on, glancing hurriedly, nervously, to where Bab stood, inwardly perturbed with strange apprehensions, with uncomprehended yearnings, yet outwardly calm, almost dignified. ‘I didn’t come for *that*,’ Hartas was saying. ‘I had another erran’—an erran’ I’m not ashamed of !’

Then he paused for want of power to continue, rather than for want of words, and Damian Aldenmede, seeing this, came forward with intentions of the kindest.

‘Have you known anyone to make that descent before ?’ he asked, speaking as of a mere question of Alpine climbing, or rather descending. ‘Pardon me for saying it, but I think you risked too much. The alum-shale hereabout is like soap—quite as slippery, quite as much to be distrusted for climbing purposes.’

‘There’s things as is more slippery, more to be distrusted than the alum-shale,’ returned the young man, still pallid, still tremulous.

No woman with a woman’s heart could have failed of pity or of sympathy ; and two women, not of the hardest natures, were beside him there.

And Damian Aldenmede was watching them, seeing on the one face—the face he had turned to note first—a white, perturbed, pathetic sadness ; on the other a burning and increasing sense of pain and anxiety, almost of fear ; and yet it was easy to see that it was the fear that is waiting to be cast out by love. He could not but understand, at least up to a certain point ; yet he knew that there was much behind that he could not see.

Half unknown to himself he was looking at this matter wholly through the eyes of another. However admirable Barbara Burdas might be as a woman of ‘the masses,’ strong to labour, yet with innate ideas of gentle living ; having for duty’s sake to give her life, her youth, her best energies to earning the bread of others as well as her own, yet cherishing a certain consciousness of the fact that man does not live by bread alone ; content to spend the best of each day in toil that might even be considered disgusting ; exposed to every element of an unkindly and hardening clime, yet indulging ceaseless yearnings after knowledge, after light, after good—yearn-



ings that had to be kept in the straitest silence—however great, almost noble, all this in its way might be, Barbara was yet no fitting sister for the refined and cultured lady standing beside her now, making a contrast as complete as humanity could show.

All this and much more the artist saw ; and in that moment it seemed to him that the truest kindness to Bab herself would be to endeavour to deliver her from the thalldom of the love into which she had so unwittingly fallen. He could see no happiness for her in any future that should include a union with this evidently hot-hearted, and perhaps more or less shallow-headed young man.

All unaware his mind was made up, and this with a swiftness, a want of deliberation almost unprecedented in his mental history. Later, he wondered over that hour by the sea at Ulvstan.

Not many seconds had passed since Hartas spoke. The young man was standing there, breathing quickly, glancing irately from one to another. As his glance fell upon Aldenmede the latter spoke :

‘ You were mentioning some errand, I think—some motive ? ’ he began inquiringly, and in placid, respectful tones—the respect a man of good breeding instinctively displays to a stranger, however inferior that stranger may be to himself. All unknowingly poor Hartas was moved to a less antagonistic attitude for the moment.

‘ Yes ; I did speak of an erran ’, he said, his brown face coming to its natural brownness, with something over. ‘ I didn’t risk my neck for nothing ! ’

‘ Naturally,’ Aldenmede replied with unaffected gravity. He had seen that Miss Theyn was looking toward him pleadingly ; that Bab’s face was averted somewhat distressfully. ‘ Naturally you did not, and your motive must have been a tolerably strong one ; and though I, perhaps, may have nothing to do with it. . . . ’

‘ I reckon you’ve more to do with it than you may be willin’ to admit ! ’ Hartas broke in angrily ; ‘ an’ if I were in your place I’d make no pretence o’ not knowing. ’

With a sudden gesture of impatience Bab turned herself towards the little group ; a light flashed to her eyes—the light of remembrance. She had not seen the Squire’s son except in the distance since that unhappy evening, when he had hurt her woman’s sense of dignity by his too fervid and too hasty behaviour. For the moment his boldness, his rudeness, his roughness had caused a something that was almost revulsion in her heart. But naturally it was only, so to speak, for the moment, and it had been succeeded by a pathetic yearning for what she thought of in her own mind as a peace-making, or at any rate some understanding that should tend to a feeling of peace ; and yet all the while she had precluded the possibility of any such opportunity happening to him ; and this, though she knew that his yearning was at least as intense as her own. So it is ever with this

‘ Most illogical  
Irrational nature of our womanhood.



That blushes one way, feels another way,  
And prays, perhaps, another.\*

And now again he was paining her, awakening within her a mingled sense of anger and heartache. Had she been alone with him, she had not shrunk from putting her pain into words, but as it was she could only restrain herself. Arresting the word that was on her lips, she turned away; but the artist had seen, and had in a measure understood.

There was yet no anger in Damian Aldenmede's heart; nothing but that large and generous pity.

'I am sorry if I have given you any cause of offence,' he said, speaking calmly. 'May I add that I have done so quite unconsciously?'

'All the same, you know what I mean?' asked Hartas.

'I fear I am beginning to suspect.'

'I'll put it into words for you,' said Barbara, coming forward and speaking tremulously. 'I'll help ya both if I can, since it seems to be me 'at's at the bottom o' the trouble. . . . Here's you' (turning to the artist), 'a stranger to the place, good an' kind-hearted, an' able to see when a woman's heart's aching for the need of help, of understandin', able to see, an' more nor that, willin' to give the help he knows to be needed; willin' to give time, an' trouble, an' pains to try to make that woman's life i' the present, and i' the future, seem brighter, an' pleasanter; better worth the livin'; willin' to give her, not only a word of encouragement, but to put the words into deeds; to come an' sit by the hour at a time in a little smoky fisherman's cottage, wi' the smell o' the oilskins, an' the salt fish, and the herrin's all about, an' never by no word nor sign to show no disgust, not for a moment; an' all this for the sake o' giving an hour's larnin' to one as had never had noän afore; but had gone on cravin' for help i' such things as a dumb beast out i' the cold might crave for the shelter it couldn't even pictur' to itself. . . . There! that's what *you* might say for yourself, if ya would. . . . An' as for you' (turning to Hartas Theyn, who stood near, with an air of uneasy sullenness), 'as for you, it's more difficult to say. You've thought to stoop down, to—to. . . .'

What ailed Barbara? What could ail a woman, young, strong, ignorant of nerves, of fainting, of hysteria? She had stopped suddenly; her breathing was coming and going rapidly, painfully; her whole frame seemed to be heaving with a sudden violence, and it was evident that no more words were possible to her. In trying to describe Hartas Theyn's position, had she attempted a task beyond her power; or was it merely that the emotion of the moment was too great to be borne?

No one had time to think.

Before Thorhilda could even attempt to comfort or soothe the girl, she perceived that two figures were rounding Yarva Ness; and

\* Mrs. Browning: *Aurora Leigh*.



almost at the same moment Barbara herself saw them. The Canon was helping Mrs. Godfrey over the slippery stones. Thorhilda went eagerly to meet them, with tearful face and outstretched hands. Here, at any rate, was strength and guidance.

‘Come!’ she exclaimed. ‘Come and make peace, Uncle Hugh! Hartas is here—he came dashing right down the face of the cliff where it is steepest—he had seen Mr. Aldenmede sketching, and had taken some wrong notions into his head. Barbara Burdas was just telling him how wrong they were. Do come and put things right!’

It was very unusual to see Thorhilda so much excited, and her excitement caused the Canon to wonder how much the strength of any ordinary woman might be exhibited in her power to keep at least an outward show of calmness.

To Mrs. Godfrey, whose notions of propriety were, in a certain sense, rather rigid, it was somewhat annoying to have to be introduced to this stranger, of whom she had heard so much, under such circumstances as these. Nevertheless she smiled sweetly, and shook hands graciously, and did her best to hide her annoyance. Then she turned to Bab and Hartas, as she might have turned to two rather troublesome children in the Sunday-school, the beautiful smile still on her lip, a general expression of wondering amiability on her face.

‘What is it all about, Hartas?’ she asked; and anyone who had known Mrs. Godfrey well might, for all her amiable look, have detected a certain undertone of vexation. ‘What is it? Ah! how I wish you would take my advice and leave Garlaff for awhile! It is unwise for a young man to remain always at home, unwise to give himself no chance of widening his mind, enlarging his experience, expanding his thoughts by contact with the thoughts and opinions of others. Do you not agree with me, Mr. Aldenmede?’ she asked, turning quickly; but the artist was talking to her husband, Bab was listening to Thorhilda’s pained regrets.

In the background, under the cliffs, half a dozen fishermen were crossing the beach, David Andoe among them, suddenly silenced in the middle of a story he had been repeating. He had recognised Bab from afar; he had seen that Hartas Theyn was one of the group; and now he was passing on, saddened, depressed with a depression that did not escape the notice of his mates. And for all the singularity they counted him to have, David was yet a favourite among them: and a whispered word was flashed along the little line of men like the lightning that goes before a storm. They understood, or believed that they did, and the new understanding added to the old determination; but the threat that Nan had heard was not repeated in David Andoe’s hearing.

No one of the little group near the easel was dreaming of any ill to be. Mrs. Godfrey, as usual, equal to every occasion, was asking Mr. Aldenmede to dine at the Rectory on the following evening without ceremony. The Canon was talking to Hartas, sauntering



on over the beach with him, drawing slowly from the youth a confession of a twofold jealousy, and therefore in all probability causeless on either hand. If Barbara were caring for David Andoe, she could certainly not be yielding to ~~any~~ fancy or feeling that might come of intercourse with such a man as Damian Aldenmede.

'You perplex me altogether,' the Canon said half sadly, and trying to keep back all reproach from his tone. 'I can understand, believe me, I can understand more than you think of your unwise affection for Barbara Burdas; but it seems to me that if you truly cared for her, you would not run the risk of alienating her for ever by such displays of small jealousy as this! There is nothing small about Barbara. She will hardly endure behaviour of this kind; and I confess that you surprise me by apparently endeavouring to see how much she will bear. . . . Yet don't mistake me! I don't mean to be hard or unsympathetic; and I am sorry to see you suffering like this. But believe a man nearly twenty years older than yourself, and fifty years more experienced in the world's ways; believe me, when I say that you are not going the right way to work to win a large-hearted woman like Barbara Burdas. You are doing your utmost to repel her best and highest feeling. Perhaps I ought to be glad of this; but I cannot, quite honestly, say that I am.'

'Why not?' Hartas asked curtly, and with an evident disposition toward incredulousness.

'Why? . . . Well, shall I tell you the truth? Perhaps I had better! I am not glad, because I think I perceive that Barbara has some affection for you. If she have, it may save you! . . . There, you have all my reason!'

Slowly, half unwillingly, and with a whole shyness, Hartas drew his clumsy brown hand from his pocket, and offered it to the Canon's grasp.

'I thank you for sayin' that,' the Squire's son replied. 'An' I trust you—that's more nor I can say for the most o' folks. . . . Yes, I trust *you*. . . . An' if I can help it, I'll go against you no more. I'll be different from to-day, if I can. I'd like to be different. I've wished it a good bit. Thorhilda told you mebbe.' (How strange it was that it should jar upon the Canon to hear his niece's Christian name used familiarly by her own brother.) 'She'd tell you 'at I'd been tryin' to make a change. But lately I've slipped back, an' I've been aware of it; but I couldn't help it, bein' so troubled; havin' no sort of hope nowhere. . . . But since you've told me *that*, I'll begin again. . . . I'll begin at once! I can't say no more!'

'I am glad you've said so much,' the Canon replied, with an extreme quietude of voice and manner. 'And I am sure you mean it. I won't say any more now—only this: if you want help, help of any kind that I can give, will you come to me? I'll make things as easy for you as I can. . . . Promise me that you will come!'

'Ay, I'll promise that,' Hartas said, in tones that made Hugh



Godfrey look up with an unintended quickness ; he saw at once that the young fellow’s eyes were suspiciously bright, as with tears held back by very force.

It was Hartas who delivered that last silent moment from its awkwardness.

‘Good-day,’ he said suddenly, again holding out his hand ; ‘I’ll go back to Garlaff by way o’ the Howes. It’s none so far round from hereabouts.’

The Canon watched him a little as he went onward, sending after him a yearning look, a sigh, a prayer.

‘There’s plenty of good in the lad yet,’ he said to himself, going back to the Ness. ‘May God defend him from the powers of ill!’

## CHAPTER XXIV.

### ‘SWEET THE HELP OF ONE WE HAVE HELPED.’

‘Some men are nobly rich, *some nobly poor*,  
Some the reverse. Rank makes no difference.’

P. J. BAILEY: *Festus*.

DAMIAN ALDENMEDE had accepted the invitation of the Godfreys to dine at the Rectory.

‘Come up to-morrow evening, if you can,’ Mrs. Godfrey had said. ‘There will only be ourselves, and perhaps Mr. Egerton ;’ and the Canon had warmly seconded the invitation ; adding, in his usual outspoken and simply cordial way :

‘One does not too often, in a small place like Yarburgh, have the chance of a chat with congenially-minded people. I hope you are remaining some time?’

‘It will depend upon my work,’ the artist had said ; and to Thorhilda’s half-unconscious regret, the reply confirmed her impression of his dependence upon his own effort.

She could not help the sigh that came ; but she might, by means of strong effort, have resisted the making of comparisons that should not have been made, with that tendency to concession growing daily in her heart which Percival Meredith was daily expecting ; always waiting for it with a finely diplomatic patience. There should be no haste ; and, until the right moment came, no more pressure.

Owing to the seclusion in which he lived, Damian Aldenmede had heard nothing of Miss Theyn’s supposed engagement ; though everywhere the matter was now spoken of as if no doubt existed. The artist was not a man to whom people could gossip ; even his landlady was learning this, somewhat to her perplexity.

All day—that is, all his working day—he had been painting in Yarva Wyke. Bab and Ailsie had been sitting to him for about an hour ; but Bab’s mind had been too full of a recent event to permit of her being quite so perfect a model as she usually was.

The story was soon told. In the night a screw-steamer had cut



her way through the herring-nets belonging to the *Star of the North*. There had been lights on board the fishing-boat; every reasonable and usual precaution had been attended to, yet disaster had overtaken the poor fishermen in the hour of their midnight toil.

‘It means many a bright pound to us,’ Bab admitted, when at last the artist’s evident sympathy unloosed her tongue; though even then she regretted the confession; and added, ‘of course, we share it among us. There’s five of us—we’ll get over it somehow.’

The artist hesitated a while, trying first to find the exact thought he wanted, then the word. It was not easy to find the latter on the spur of the moment.

By way of temporising, he said, ‘Is the name of the steamer known?’

‘Yes, they saw it on her stern fair enough as she sheered off. She was the *Oriana*, of Cardiff.’

‘And can no redress be had—I mean, cannot an action be brought to compel the owners of the vessel to pay at least something toward the damage done to the nets?’

Bab laughed, a sad, sarcastic, understanding little laugh.

‘It is little you know,’ she replied, not meaning to be unflattering. ‘Why there’s never a week i’ the herring season but somebody’s nets is cut all to bits. An’ where d’ya think fisher-folks ’ud get the money to go to law, wi’ the lawyers all on the side o’ the rich owners? It ’ud cost more to pay the law bills than you could get new nets for. No, we never think o’ seekin’ justice. The law isn’t for such as us; an’ the owners an’ captains o’ them screw-steamers know it. They’d be more careful if they’d any fear.’

Again the artist was silent for a moment. Presently, speaking with a grave considerateness, he said:

‘It seems to me then that there is only one earthly hope for you—the help of friends. For instance, since you have helped me so much—you and Ailsie, given me such help that in all probability my picture will be hung in the Grosvenor Gallery—that is a place in London where many beautiful pictures are hung, and sometimes sold—since you have given me this help, why should I not help you? Why should I not provide your grandfather’s boat, or rather the one he has a share in, with new nets? . . . I should like to do it! Will you allow me?’

Barbara’s face as she listened was certainly a study; and one worthy of any portrait-painter’s best attention. The sadness that was half-amusement, the wonder that was half-pity, would have taxed any ordinary talent to the uttermost.

‘You’ll buy new nets for the *Star o’ the North*?’ she said, with an inquiring note in her accent not quite free from something that was almost derision. ‘What d’ya suppose they’d cost? Ninepence a-piece, mebbe? or it may be you’d think of hevin’ to go as far as eighteenpence! Eh, me! Why, a new set complete ’ud never cost far short of a hundred pounds! Think o’ that! An’ you to talk o’



giving 'em, as one 'ud give a tramp 'at asked for a light for his pipe a farden box o' matches! Eh, but you mun know little o' the valley o' money if that's how you think on it! New nets for a fishin' coble! It fair stuns one to hear ya talk!

The artist had listened quite gravely, subdued his amusement to interest quite successfully.

'A hundred pounds, did you say?'

'Ay! That's what I said! . . . Anyhow, buyin' the nets at the very cheapest we'll never get 'em for no less nor ninety.'

'That is a large sum, relatively,' the artist replied. . . . 'But—I do not tell you this by way of boasting; quite the reverse—last year I sold a picture for about the same price. It was one that I had painted in a very short time, and happening to have no need of the money, I have not touched it. I had reasons for wishing not to put it to any of the ordinary uses of life. For one thing, it was the first picture I had ever sold; for another' (and here the artist hesitated, and seemed embarrassed), 'for another reason, something had passed between the buyer of the picture and myself long ago, very long ago, that made me wish to put the money aside for some especial purpose, some emergency happening to some life—not my own. It seems to me that this emergency is now before me. I could buy the nets; and so far from missing the money, I should feel that I had, at last, freed myself from a trust.'

The look of wonder, of perplexity, was deepening on Barbara's face; sadness and wistfulness mingling with it.

'There's a lot o' things you could buy for a hundred pounds!' she said presently.

'True! I have told you why I cannot buy them, with that money. Though, please remember, I told you in confidence. Perhaps I do not need to add that.'

Barbara looked into his eyes steadfastly.

'If I thought you mistrusted me once, you'd have no opportunity o' doin' it again,' she said, adding, 'Eh, but it does take folks a long time to know one another down to the bottom!'

There was another brief silence before she spoke again. Evidently she had been thinking of the artist rather than of herself.

'If ya couldn't buy nought wi' that money, ya might live in better lodgin's. Yon's noän a place for you!'

'Why not? But, if it troubles you, I may say that I could, if I wished to do so, stay at the hotel. It is not on account of the expense that I prefer the Förecliff.'

'At the "Empress o' India,"' Bab said, rather to herself than quite aloud. It was only the other day that Mrs. Nossifer at the fish-shop in the Cliff Road at Yarburgh had told her that the gentlemen who stayed at the new hotel at Ulvstan were charged a guinea a day for their food and lodging. Bab had acceptè the fact as surprising, but not as one likely ever to concern herself, or even anyone she might know. Now she recalled it in silence.



'You have not given me any answer?' the artist said presently, in a tone of inquiry. 'Tell me what you are thinking.'

'I'm thinking this,' Bab replied with a quite new emphasis, and tremulously conscious of a certain amount of daring. 'I'm thinkin' 'at you're noän what you seem. . . . You're noän one o' them 'at paints pictures for a livin'.'

'No? What makes you think that?'

'Everything! You've noän the manner, nor the bearin' o' them 'at hes to depend on other folk for the bread they eat.'

Aldenmede paused a moment; then he said:

'Granted, so far! For if I am not working solely for my own bread, why should I not try to help those who must do so? why, for instance, should you refuse to allow me to help you in a trouble that has unexpectedly come upon you?'

Barbara looked at him again; her lips were trembling with the unsaid words, but her thought was not for herself, nor wholly of the artist. She had others in her mind, others to whom this munificence would seem as a miraculous gift of God.

'You may help if you will,' she said at last. The words might have been counted ungracious, but her manner, the emotion of it, neutralized all idea of that kind. 'You may if you will,' she repeated. Then, out of the fulness of her heart, rather than by aid of any shadow of impertinence, she added, 'I'd noän be surprised if ya turned out to be a duke.'

Much laughter was not in Aldenmede's way, yet to his relief and to Bab's he indulged for once. Presently, still smiling, he said:

'I suppose, then, that all the surprise would be on my part! Certainly it would be very great. . . . Believe me, your imagination is running away with you!'

'But noän sa far?'

'Very far indeed.'

'You've no title o' no sort?'

'Not a shadow of one. I should like, I should very much like to write R.A. after my name, or even A.R.A., which means something much less. But I am talking idly. Enough of pleasantries of that kind. They are not so very pleasant after all. . . . And now it is all settled! I may buy the nets?'

'Will ya think on it till the mornin'?'

'No; pardon me, I have given more than enough of thought to the matter. I have other things to think of.'

'Yes; so you have,' Barbara replied after a moment of hesitation. 'Things 'at's mebbe even more to you nor that.' . . . Then, with a swift change of tone, she said, 'You're goin' up there to get your dinner to-night—to the Rectory?'

'Yes.'

'Do you like goin'?'

'Yes. I am very glad to go.'

'I don't doubt it. . . . Yet I'm noän envyin' you.'



‘No. I should not think that a common enviousness was much in your way.’

‘You can see that? . . . Well’s it’s true. Still one can’t help thinkin’ sometimes; sometimes wishin’ . . . Why is there such difference atween one an’ another?’

‘Why indeed?’

The fisher-girl had set a problem that the educated gentleman was almost as unable to solve as she herself was, though he was not thinking about it now for the first time. Yet, seeing that the question had been asked in no bitterness of heart or mood, he did his best to make the girl perceive up to the point he himself perceived.

‘Why these differences between class and class exist is more than I can say,’ he answered. ‘Perhaps it is more than anyone can say. It is enough for a reverent mind that they were ordained of God. Along the whole line of what we term sacred history there is proof of that from the day when we hear of the herdsmen who tended Abram’s cattle to this day. But there is proof also that God Himself had a special regard for the poor. David perceived that; and the mere fact of God’s own Son *choosing* a life of poverty should reconcile some of us who are very far from any true reconciliation. Still, it is a mystery. One might think, to read of the pauperism, the suffering of the poor of our own time, that God had forgotten them, or had, at least, forgotten to be gracious; but that can never be. *Why* He permits such suffering I cannot tell; but this I can tell, that it is the duty of everyone who is *not* suffering to do something for those who are; to think of them and for them; to try at least to comfort them in their sorrows; to help them over their troubles; in a word, to show them some friendliness, some human, loving-kindness.’

‘It’s the poor ’at helps the poor, for the most part,’ said Bab, speaking almost like one in a dream. ‘I could tell ya many a tale o’ things ’at’s happened at Ulvstan Bight, things ’at might surprise ya. It was yesterday ya were speaking o’ self-sacrifice, an’ I thought o’ some I know. We’re noän such a hard lot as you might think!’

‘You shall tell me some of the tales before I go away; that is if you will.’

‘Before you go away! . . . . You’re noän goin’!’

The artist smiled not unpleasantly.

‘You did not think I had come to live in Ulvstan Bight, did you?’

‘Mebbe not,’ Bab replied. Then more wistfully she asked, ‘But ya’ll noän go till the picture’s done, will ya?’

‘I shall not need to stay here to finish it. . . . . But I can do no more to-day. . . . . Will you ask your grandfather to come and have a chat with me to-morrow morning? I want to know more about those accidents to the fishing-nets.’



## CHAPTER XXV.

## DAMIAN ALDENMEDE AT THE RECTORY.

' Have you seen but a bright lily grow  
     Before rude hands have touched it ?  
 Have you marked but the fall of the snow  
     Before the soil has smutched it ?  
 Have you felt the wool of the beaver ?  
     Or swan's-down ever ?  
 Or have smelt o' the bud of the briar ?  
     Or the nard in the fire ?  
 Or have tasted the bag o' the bee ?  
 Oh, so white ! oh, so soft ! oh, so sweet is she !

BEN JONSON.

It is strange how some men seem to change with the changing of the society about them ; there might even seem to be hypocrisy in such modifications, or at least weakness of will and character. But in truth these drawbacks are not always existent. A sensitive nature responds to its environment so unconsciously that it is often utterly unaware of its own facility in responding, and the too-friendly friend who shall point out the seeming inconsistency may give a thrust not lightly or easily borne.

You are in trouble, or you have pain, apprehension, and you write a letter to an old friend who has known your history from first to last. Naturally, almost inevitably, you permit yourself the relief of an utter outpouring. You may know yourself to be even morbidly apprehensive, yet you dare to admit this ; you are aware that you are feeling some pain, mental and physical, with an undue keenness ; yet you can confess it, and this readily, gladly. Or some little bit of unusual joy has come in your way, and in unwonted exuberance of spirit you ask that your friend shall rejoice with you. In a word, you wear your heart, not on your sleeve, but on a sheet or two of note-paper. And, believe it always, the true friend is drawn to be truer ; he would scorn to betray you to even his own soul's censure.

That letter written, you write another to another correspondent, you date it with the same date, write it in the same hour ; yet this second letter shall be (without your being wholly aware of it) stiff and chill and pallid. Not only heart shall be missing, but soul, spirit, even intellect.

Were these letters read out to you on a later day, in the presence, not of enemies (we none of us have enemies in these suave times), but of friends who are on sufficiently intimate terms with you to express the measure of their friendliness by the amount of their freedom, you would blush for your own apparent duplicity. It would seem nothing less than that.

And yet there is no equivocation, no intentional or other insincerity. A man's nature is manifold, and can turn this side to the friend who wins his confidence, this to the man whose talent he



admires, this to one who needs only a social courtesy ; so it is that he can meet so many other human souls with some human pleasure, some refreshment. It is only the narrow of spirit, the uncultured in social intercourse, who imagine that they discern mendacity in this varied face turned to a varying humanity.

Naturally enough Damian Aldenmede was unaware that he was a different man to his host and hostess at the Rectory from that he had seemed to be to Barbara Burdas. To the latter he was genial, sympathetic, not caring to hide the fact that he was thoughtful for her present and her future. To the former he was a grave and comparatively silent man—in a certain sense evidently a man of the world, betraying a distinction of manner and aspect that instantly won its due regard. And yet the Godfreys, as well as their niece, were conscious of something to which they could put no name. To have used the word ‘mystery’ would have been to suggest something that none of them for a moment intended.

He did not talk much of himself, this new guest, and no one at the Rectory, save Gertrude Douglas, made the slightest attempt to induce him to do so. And though it could not be said that he declined to respond to her effort, yet but little real knowledge was elicited. He was an Englishman, he had travelled much abroad, especially in Italy, and had been glad to return to his own country. He gave a decided impression of having nothing to hide ; but, on the other hand, he made it evident that he did not greatly care to permit himself to become a topic of conversation in his own presence. His host took care that his desire was respected.

The dinner passed off as dinners at the Rectory always did, pleasantly and easily. No display for display’s sake was visible ; no neglect or inadequacy tolerated. The Canon was in one of his happiest and most winning moods. Mr. Egerton was, as usual, equal to anything and everything that came in his way ; and the conversation sparkled about this topic and about that, as it will when people give themselves, for the lighter social hour, to interchange of the more superficial ideas of life and living. But gradually, almost inevitably, the stream deepened. Before the evening was over the new guest was better comprehended at Yarburgh Rectory.

It was evident that he had intended no betrayal of himself. All unaware he was drawn by the Canon’s earnestness to confess his own ; perhaps confessing more than he was well aware of.

‘You say that it is weighing upon you more than anything else—the present condition of the poor of England, of your own parish,’ he had replied in answer to a remark the Canon had made. ‘I can well believe it. I have often thought that it must be even more terrible for a clergyman than for anyone else.’

‘So it is ; he stands in such a different position towards the poor. He preaches a gospel of brotherhood, or professes to do so ; but mostly he refrains from details on that head in his sermons and perhaps wisely. For what does such brotherhood mean, for even the best of us ? What do we really know of our brother ?



What do we really care? In the heart of us, what is the depth of our caring?

‘Be moderate!’ interrupted Mr. Egerton, his *spiritual* face lighting up with earnest entreaty. ‘Don’t run the risk of giving a false impression. Mr. Aldenmede is a stranger; he may take you at your own valuation!’

‘It would be wise of him to do so. Mr. Aldenmede has seen enough, known enough of humanity, to know that no man confesses himself a sinner who has not sinned; not unless he has tendencies more or less morbid, an accusation of which I am not afraid.’

‘Doesn’t it rather depend upon what one calls sin, or even error, or mistake?’ the artist asked. ‘With regard to the problem of the suffering poor we have all of us erred, most of us are yet erring; but one is glad to see everywhere a certain sensitiveness on the subject, oft enough showing itself in irritation, annoyance, sometimes in incredulousness, sometimes in an attempt to prove that each state of life has its own “compensations.” What can be the compensation for having no fire, no food, no clothing worth the name; no decent bed even; and only the most inhuman shelter?’

‘But,’ said Mr. Egerton, ‘but short of that extreme of want, putting all such extremes aside for the moment, do you not think that even the life of the very poor has alleviations?’

‘Alleviations!’ exclaimed Aldenmede. ‘Yes, thank Heaven! One is glad to know that it has, to believe in it to the uttermost. I may say that some of the happiest and pleasantest people I have known have been people who were living from week to week. Alleviation! Their life is, in many cases, full of it! So long as things keep on at the moderate level of possible living they have few cares, anxiety dies down, fear for the future is quiescent. Such people often have the kindest feelings; they have known trouble, sickness, loss, pain; and these things have made them sympathetic, and sympathy brings them nearer to their friends and neighbours. Oh, “love in a cottage” is not a dream! It may be an ideal; but it might be the most magnificent, most beneficent ideal. It wants raising, however. The man who lives and loves in a cottage wants help for the most part, such help as can only come from those who are somewhat his superiors in culture, in insight. He wants teaching *how* to find delight in books, in music, in art, in all things lovely, and pure, and of good report; the things that elevate thought, that awaken the beginnings of aspiration. He needs to be made to perceive that the mere possession of houses, of land, of capital, can do nothing to help his highest happiness; to be shown how, in the simplest wayside cottage, life may be lived as its very best, life intellectual, life spiritual—nay, one might almost say the perfect life which has been the ideal of the saints from the first Christian century to this nineteenth. It has never died out, the grand vision. It never can. Perfection! Well for the man who has not ceased to dream of it, to yearn for it, to work for it! If the mere yearning exists in any man, that man is



to be envied. How to implant it where it does not exist should be one of the problems of the modern philanthropist.'

Thorhilda had been seated at the piano for the last half-hour, now and then playing one of the softer of Mendelssohn's Lieder, now and then stopping to listen, to say a few words to Gertrude Douglas, who was sitting with her embroidery near the table by the piano. It was evident that the evening was proving more or less a disappointing one to Miss Douglas; and Thorhilda, seeing that such was the case, left the piano and went to the fireside, where her uncle stood on the rug, the new guest near him. Mrs. Godfrey was seated on the sofa by the fire.

'Are you not tired of my uncle's parochial conversation?' Miss Theyn asked, looking into Mr. Aldenmede's sad grave face. 'Uncle Hugh, I know, will never be tired; but he may weary other people. . . . I often wish I were poor—quite poor, like Barbara Burdas, for instance; then he would care for me!'

There was a pause. The artist was watching the piquant humour of the lovely face before him, the changing light in the gray appealing eyes, the tender winning smile with which she turned to her uncle. What sweetness such a woman was capable of putting into any home-life! What beauty! What grace! Even for one evening to taste of such life, to feel the warmth of it, was like coming under some touch of enchantment.

The artist had forgotten the reply he intended to make. 'Barbara Burdas!' he said at last. 'What a good woman she is! Speaking of the poor, of their desert, their endurance, where will you find a braver or a better girl? Think of all that she has done, is yet doing, and by her own unaided strength, so far as human help is concerned! She likes to keep up the fiction that her grandfather helps; and naturally the old man likes to keep up the same comforting notion. But it is a notion utterly mistaken. She profits somewhat by his share, or part of a share, in the *Star of the North*, but last year the sum was less than four pounds; it did not pay for the rent of the house. And this year, owing to accidents, damage done by the trawlers, and such-like things, she is afraid it will be even less; yet she never utters a word of complaint. It is old Ephraim who does the complaining, though he admits that he "wants for nothing."'

'The most striking thing about Barbara is her craving for knowledge, for education,' said the Canon, who knew a little of what was being said in the Bight as to the artist's kindness in lending the girl books, helping her to understand them, and teaching her in a general way something of the right use and meaning of her own language. But the Canon made no direct reference to the subject, though he perceived that Miss Douglas was waiting with suspended needle for details of the matter.

She was not to be gratified. Aldenmede replied only to what the Canon had said.

'That is one striking thing; another is her hatred of all coarse-



ness or roughness, her desire for refinement ; and being surrounded by things rough and coarse, her duty seeming to lie amongst them, her everyday life must be more or less one of pain to a sensitive nature. Yet I do not believe that she ever dreams of escape of any kind ; that in one sense she can even be said to desire it. That is the touchstone. She does her duty, and more ; and being urged onward and upward by unseen influences she knows no content in so doing. How should she ? Contentment is not for such as Barbara. To be content is too often to know no aspiration for one's self or for others, to know no sympathy, to have no human outlook, no passionate human desire for progress, for attainment of any kind. Contentment ! It is for the cattle in the fields, that graze and fatten and die ! No thinking human soul can in these days be contented.'

Thorhilda was listening, thinking, recalling the speech of another on the same topic, and as she thought her heart-beats came the faster. Was she not deliberately dreaming of this lower content ? And at what cost ? Never had the price seemed to be what it seemed now with this stranger standing by her uncle's hearth, unveiling his own heart, his own aspiration, all unknowingly. She shrank even from herself as she listened. It was as if some voice were heard drawing her from ease, from wealth, from luxury, entreating her to take some higher way. And, harder still, this higher way was made attractive. She could hardly help fearing that this stranger had read her true character. She seemed to discern his perception in every look, every word. And the more she discerned, the more she was drawn to watch for further signs. Here, if anywhere, was the guide she had longed for, the one true helper, the one adequate friend. Again the feeling that she had first known on that day by the sea came back to her, but with redoubled emotion, and again it was followed by the remembrance that all such feelings must be put strongly away.

'Strongly and surely,' she said to herself that night in her own room as she walked up and down, trying to quiet her unsettled spirit, yet unable to put away from her mental vision that grave yet tender glance, to close her ears to the tones of the most sympathetic, and sad, and kindly voice she had ever heard. Now, for the first time, she realized what it was to be subjugated by a look, coerced by a turn of the head, silenced by another's silence. What might it mean, this new and peculiar experience ? Whatever it meant it must be put away, and the sooner the better, the better for everyone concerned. 'It is evident he does not know,' Thorhilda continued to herself, 'he has not heard of—of Mr. Meredith, of his friendship for me. He must know soon, very soon ! Then it will be over—this—this unrest, this strain. It will all be over, and I shall be at peace. . . . Will he come again ? It would be better that he should not—better far. . . . Yet it would be pleasant, very pleasant. . . . And I am not a fool. . . . Indeed, now that I think of it, I should wish him to come to the Rectory again, that I might prove to my-



self my self-possession. I wish it, certainly I do, and I wish that he may come soon! The sooner he comes the sooner will this unrest be ended.'

## CHAPTER XXVI.

## I MIND ME HOW WE PARTED THEN.

'So have I dreamed! oh, may the dream be true;  
That praying souls are purged from mortal hue,  
And grow as pure as He to Whom they pray.'

HARTLEY COLERIDGE.

DAMIAN ALDENMEDE, coming home in the moonlight alone, did not dream that Barbara Burdas was watching him from the side of the Forecliff, above the Sagged House. She stood in the shadow there, though it was nearly midnight, looking out over the cliff-top ways. The sea was rolling softly, breaking monotonously, even sadly for one in a sad mood; and Bab's mood was not of the brightest. An intolerable sense of yearning had possessed her all the evening, as if somewhere, some influence were drawing her from herself; and the strain was so great that she found herself to be wearier than usual—weary of life, of light, of all things. Once David Andoe, had passed by, not stopping to speak, but looking at her as he went onward with the old heart-broken look that was growing to be so painful since Bab was learning what such pain meant. Yes, she knew now; and as she stood there, thinking of the Rectory, trying to imagine what could be happening there, how each one would be looking at and speaking to the other, her knowledge seemed to deepen; and presently, when her thoughts wandered away to Garlaff, to Hartas Theyn, who might be there, or might not, she could not help dropping a quiet tear or two. The quietness was not the measure of the bitterness.

'It's hard to be sa lonely, an' to care so for others all the while; an' all the while to know 'at you can never be nought to them,' she said, half audibly. 'Mebbe I'd not mind it so if I weren't sa lone!'

So she stood, wondering if perhaps the artist might pass that way—if he would stop and speak. It was one of Bab's weak moments, and her soul was hungering for a word. All was so still in the little house behind her, where her grandfather slept, and the children; all was so still on the land and on the sea; and the very stillness seemed to have aching in it, and pain.

'It is dree—oh it is dree!' she cried softly to herself, clasping her hands, and lifting her eyes as if she would pierce the very stars for a sign. But none came that night. Her appeal was a prayer; but not yet was it to be answered.

Bab did not see when the artist passed out of sight. The road was hidden by a point of the green cliff-top, and he did not reappear on the shoreward pathway. It was as she guessed. He had been drawn by the beauty of the night to go down to the rocks



below, where the moonlight was quivering upon the wrack-fringed pools that the sea had left. He went on rapidly over the way he knew so well now ; keeping mainly to the shelving banks of seaworn gravel that had collected just below the sand-dunes under the cliff. The moon was still sparkling upon the sea ; brightly, yet softly ; the small waves were still breaking with far faint murmurings. All was bright light, or deep shadow ; all was silence, and peace, and beauty.

And all was calm, save the heart and brain of the man who was walking rapidly, fighting with himself, with a new and strong temptation ; a temptation that had come upon him suddenly, and yet not all undreaded. There had been a moment of warning ; a soul wounded long ago had spoken words of entreaty to a heart not yet beyond the possibility of further wounding. He had listened, promised obedience—and now the chance of keeping his promise was threatened grievously. But he was well aware.

The very rapidity of his movement betrayed the force of the emotion that was impelling him onward, beyond the Bight, beyond the Ness, beyond the rocks and caves he knew so familiarly.

It had not been so before. Love had come to him with all the soft and sweet enchantment of love. He had not known or dreamed of resistance.

Now all was otherwise. He had loved ; he had been betrayed ; he had suffered—suffered so that he dreaded love as a man might dread the most desolating disaster his human life could know.

Until this evening he had seen, and clearly, all that a second such passion might mean to him ; now he saw no longer. Here was the one serious sign of the pass to which he had come. Now he could perceive nought save the drawing, the delight, the good, the happiness—the most perfect happiness ever beheld by him, even in his most perfect vision.

All the drear dread days of his penance poured their depths into this day ; all the lost days of his delight returned their essence upon this.

‘I have been as one dead,’ he said to himself as he went onward ; ‘I have had life, and yet I have not lived ; I have had the appearance of living without the reality ; I have professed belief in hoping, whilst I myself was hopeless ; I have taught loving, whilst I myself was loveless. And now—*now* whither am I being led ? May all that is good guide me ; all that is strong strengthen me, for I would not willingly fall—no, I would not fall again—such falling is too terrible. Half my life has gone in trying to recover from that last undoing, and I thought its effect not yet over. Was it over ? It is a dozen years since—more than a dozen, I think ; but I hardly know, since time has gone by on wings so broken—now speeding feverishly, now halting faintly—but never at a natural pace. . . . And what does this portend, this change, this sudden glow of light—the light of hope ? Another disaster ? or compensation for the last ? . . . If it might mean the latter, if it might !



Dare I think it will? Does Fate ever take a sudden turn in the middle of a man's life, lifting him from the lowest depth of negation to the supreme height of fulfilment? Is it possible? There are those who declare that it is not—that a life once certainly set on ill-fated lines can come to no true point of turning, of real escape; but that I do not believe, I have never believed it; too much lies in a man's own hand for any pre-dooming of that kind to be taken as a rule. No; it could never be! Far better the old and worn-out proverb that declares that it is a long lane that has no turning! . . . Dare I hope that I have come to a turning? . . . How good she looks! how pure! how true! Her every expression has sympathy in it, and perception, with now and then faint touches of something that is almost sadness. It is like a question, that sad look, like an appeal! More than once I longed to know her thought, as if it must be something needing help, needing consolation. . . . Shall I see her to-morrow? Will she come down to the beach? Shall I venture there, or shall I fly by the first train to-morrow morning? . . . If I did—if I even did that, my life would no more be the life it has been!

So absorbed had Damian Aldenmede been in his own reflections that certain sounds, not very distinct or aggressive, had fallen upon his ear almost without his noticing them; then all at once it seemed to him that he heard human voices in the distance, voices that seemed raised in anger or distress. The sound came from beyond the point of the dark rock that stretched across the beach; and very naturally he hastened onward, feeling more and more certain each step that he should find someone in need of assistance. But all at once, just as he rounded the point of rock, the sounds fell upon the air, fell to a lower tone, and more pathetically moving.

Before he saw the dark figure kneeling upon the sands he knew that only one voice was uplifted, the voice of a man in a very agony of prayer. Instinctively he stood still, took off his hat, and prayed with and for the lonely suppliant, who knelt with bared brow and uplifted hands under the midnight sky. No thought of retreating occurred to the artist.

He did not at first dream that it was David Andoe who knelt thus. That it was one of the fishermen of the neighbourhood he knew by the tone and the dialect; but by-and-by he discerned that it was the man whose love for Barbara Burdas was apparently one of the chief topics of conversation at Ulvstan.

He was near enough to hear most of the words that fell tremulously from the man's lips; touching, simple words they were; and though in a sense familiar, they were yet reverently uttered.

'Oh, Jesus!' he was saying, 'let ma speak yet again, an' yet again hear ma whiles Ah'm speakin'! Ah've never another friend—no, not one 'at cares; an' my heart's well-nigh breakin' wi' sorrow. Ah'm fair sick wi' sorrow, an' worse nor that, my sorrow's leadin' me inta sin. Ah'm thinkin' on *her* when Ah should be thinkin' o' Thee; prayin' 'at she may turn te me when Ah'd better be prayin'



for grace te turn more wholly to Thee. All my prayers is tainted wi' the thought of her, an' oftens enuff Ah can't pray at all. Ah can't see Thee for the sight of her comin' atween; an' what can Ah do? What can Ah do to stop my heart fra achin' an' yearnin'? What *can* Ah do?

And then the pleading voice fell a little, the words became indistinct, and Aldenmede would have turned away silently, as he had come; but he could not; some constraining force of sympathy drew him a little nearer. He would speak with David Andoe when his prayer was ended. The words were more audible again now.

'Whatever happens to me, be good te *her*,' the poor fellow was continuing. 'Let no trouble come anigh *her*. Keep her fra doin' aught 'at's wrong, aught 'at 'ud bring misery to her afterward. An' if she has ony sorrow now, do Thou comfort it *Thyself*, wi' that love o' Thine, that love 'at Ah can't yet feel rightly mysel'. Somehow Ah know it's there; Ah believe in it wi' my head, but Ah can't get hold on it wi' my heart, not so as to feel happy wiv it, and satisfied. That's what Ah'm wantin', but Ah can't get hold on it. Ah niver could, not so as te be no help te me when Ah was needin' help. . . . An' Ah need it noo! if iver Ah wanted upholdin' Ah do to-night! Ah'm sa desperst lone—Ah'm a'most faint wi' loneliness an' unfriendedness, an' wi' the want o' peace; Ah've no peace nowheres, not even a place where Ah can lie my head i' peace. . . . An' mebbe it hes te be so, mebbe it hes, so as Ah may larn 'at there's no peace nowheres oot o' Thee—*none but that 'at passes all understandin'*. . . . God gie me that—that precious peace!'

Once more the pleading voice trembled and failed, and by-and-by another sound came upon the wind, the sound of painful, convulsive sobbing. The moon was half hidden in a nest of clouds, there were shadows upon the sands of the Bight. Then by-and-by all was still, silent.

The fisherman, yet kneeling, heard the steps upon the beach behind him, and rose to his feet just as the moon swept herself free of the clouds that were driving on. He recognised the artist, who spoke at once.

'Forgive me,' he said in kindly and sympathetic tones. 'I had not dreamed of finding anyone on the beach so late. . . . I was walking here because I was troubled, not thinking to find anyone in the same trouble, or nearly the same, as my own. Believe me, I meant no intrusion.'

David hesitated awhile. He had heard much of what had been said on the Forecliff about the stranger's influence over Barbara, but the freemasonry which exists between one true soul and another had hitherto prevented him from having any doubt, any fear of the artist. Yet now for a moment all was changed. Andoe was trying to collect himself so far that he might do no injustice to another, but in his large sympathy not much effort was needed.

'Ah'm noän sure as I understand, sir,' he replied. 'You've heard me, you've heard as Ah was i' trouble, an' you saäy your trouble's the



same as mine. . . . Do Ah understand ya rightly?—you're carin' for *her*, for Barbara Burdas?

The poor fisherman could not see the expression on the artist's face; it might have been helpful to him if he could.

'For Barbara Burdas!' Aldenmede exclaimed in a tone most comforting. 'I was not even thinking of her at the present moment, except in connection with yourself. No; to prevent misunderstanding, let me say plainly that I was thinking of someone else, and for sympathy's sake I may add, someone who is troubling me much as Barbara is troubling you. I think it was this drew me to come and speak to you, instead of turning back, as I was moved to do at first. . . . I thought that perhaps I might say a word to comfort you, or, if not that, I thought that mere sympathy might be some consolation. I have often in my life found it so—that to speak with one who had endured the same suffering as myself was in some subtle way very helpful.'

'Ah doän't doobt,' said the fisherman, only half understanding much that he had heard. Presently he said, 'You've seen a good bit o' Barbara lately, sir?'

'Yes, I have; and I may add that the more I have seen of her the better I have liked her.'

'That was certain. . . . But you spoke o' comfort—surely you'd never ha' done that if you'd known all they were sayin'—the folks i' the toon—at she's only one thought, an' that for the Squire's son.'

'I have heard of that. . . . I have thought of it. I may say that I have thought of it a good deal.'

'D'ya know him, sir?'

'I have seen him once.'

'Then that would be yesterday—yesterday afternoon?'

'Yes, so it was! It seems a week ago!'

'Ah were passin' by at the time—me an' my mates. An' 'twere that made my heart sa sore, that drove me out here last night, an' again to-night, to seek for a spot where Ah could be alone. . . . Ah'd noä other place.'

'And I have disturbed you? . . . I am sorry, very sorry! But I meant well.'

'That Ah'm sure on, sir. An' since you've spokken so kind, Ah may saäy 'at more nor once Ah've wished ta hev speech o' ya. Knowin' 'at you'd influence over Bab, Ah thought mebbe 'at if ye knew all ya'd say a word for me. Ah believe—naäy, Ah know—as she'd take a deal o' notice o' what you saäy. . . . An' hoo can Ah tell ya the rest? Hoo can Ah tell you o' the one she seems to ha' set her heart on? Ah noän wish te be guilty o' the sin o' evil-speaking—a sin 'at surely does such harm i' the world as only Satan hissself can know on—noä; God helpin' me, Ah'll noän saäy aught again him as Ah can help. Ah'll only ask ya ta think for yourself as ta whether one like me, 'at's plashed i' the saut water for my bread even sen Ah was eleven years old, 'ud be more likely te win



bread for her an' hers nor a skip-jack like yon, 'at's walked the eth wiv his han's in his pockets an' a pipe in his mouth, well-nigh iver sen he could walk at all? Ah'll leave it to you, sir, te think that question oot, and then to act as seems ya best. Ah'll saäy nought o' myself o' my oän trouble. . . . Mebbe you've heerd anuff. An' if Ah've said aught o' him Ah shouldn't ha' said, aught 'at sounded like malice or a bad sperrit, why, then, forgive it, please, sir, an' forget it. Ah noän meant ta be malicious.'

It was only a word or two that Damian Aldenmede said in reply—a word of assurance, of comprehension. But the fisherman went on his way comforted; the artist went on his way somewhat perplexed, yet with a very definite picture in his own mind of David Andoe's happiness by some cottage fireside with Barbara Burdas for the spring and inspiration of his happiness.

And a touch of something that was almost envy came with the vision. A home fireside, a happy home! Surely that was the Alpha and Omega of human felicity! Given the highest hopes, the highest ambitions, even aspirations, yet when were such ever reached by men whose home-life was chilled, embittered? Loneliness might be *endurable*, but it was only that. The man who had no sustenance save such as came to him from contact with the outer world was a man to be pitied indeed. His life could know no true encouragement, no true support. In times of failure, or of pain, what had he to rest upon for consolation? In hours of success, if such came to him, of what value was the thing that men were congratulating him upon? It had not even a name of any real import. It was not happiness; it was not content; it was not felicity! Success was hardly successfulness to the man who must meet his day's ending in an empty room, by a lonely fireside, with not a hand to clasp his in the warmth of the new emotion; not a voice to say, 'Well done'; not a heart to beat in unison with his own heart's increased pulsation.

Much of the artist's thought as he went homeward was for himself, much for David Andoe and Barbara Burdas; and the strong feeling he had for the latter found some expression in his conversation with Barbara; but to his regret he was quickly made to perceive that his words were but as snowflakes upon a running stream of contrary emotion. Bab had no thought of David Andoe, save of his pain and of his trouble, of which she was but too well aware; she had no other thought of him.

'Don't speak of it,' she had said in conclusion. 'Don't speak of it never again. . . . My life's over—all that's worth the name o' life. I'll live, God helpin' me; I'll live for many a year yet. I mun do that for the sake o' them 'at needs my life. Ya can tell David that—it may quiet him; it's quietin' for me. . . . Yes; just tell him that my life's o'er. . . . I've made the last moän I'll make i' this world, or so I think! There's no knowin' what's i' store.'



## CHAPTER XXVII.

## A WILD NIGHT'S WORK.

'A man can have but one life and one death.  
. . . . Let me fulfil my fate.'

ROBERT BROWNING.

AFTERWARD, long afterward, it was said that there had been a settled plan for the work of that wild night in the Bight of Ulvstan; but the saying was untrue. The whole, from first to last, was a consecutive series of accidents, undesigned, and in a certain sense unpremeditated: one leading to another by the sort of inevitableness that is not so uncommon in human life, as anyone might perceive who was careful in noting such sequences.

It all happened on the night following that on which the artist and David Andoe had met so unexpectedly on the beach. Neither had then dreamed of what the next night was to bring.

As it has been told, they met and separated somewhere about midnight. The artist had gone home, but not to rest; sleep was impossible. The only possible thing was bewildering and torturing thought. Before dawn he rose, went down to the sea for his bath, and returned to the Forecliff to watch the grand stormy rising of the sun. It was impressive that morning beyond description. The rose-red bars lay straight across the sky between bars of orange-vermilion, and these again were bounded by bands of burning scarlet. Not the faintest, floating, formless cloud disturbed the impression made by the long, unbroken, glowing lines. No painter—not even Turner himself—might even have attempted to reproduce such a sky; its calmness of form, its dazzling luminousness of colour, its tragic glow of intensity. All the morning the influence of it was upon the receptive mind of the artist. He expected some sudden storm to arise; and when, about noon, the sun was obscured, the whole sky overspread by a gray, leaden cloud which showed only a rift here and there, disclosing the ærial silver fields beyond, he felt that the change was but the precursor of something wilder and more majestic. Yet no wind had arisen as yet; not a ripple disturbed the cold ominous gray of the boundless sea.

So the evening closed in; a dead leaden colouring was upon the outdoor world everywhere. The great gray gulls flapped their wings slowly between a gray heaven and a grayer world of waters. Hardly a sail was visible in the offing. The herring fleet had gone northward, and was in safer shelter than that afforded by Ulvstan Bight; only a pleasure-boat or two remained moored by the quay. The greater part of the smaller craft of the place had been drawn up to the Forecliff; they were better there.

It might be eight o'clock when Barbara came out to the door of the Sagged House, glancing to the north and to the south with her usual discerning glance. Not a star had appeared; no moon might



pierce that dense cloud-pall which had seemed to hang lower and yet lower each time she had observed it. And ever the same ominous stillness brooded beneath, upon the land, and upon the deep, chill darkness of the pitiless sea.

'It'll be on us afore mornin'!' Bab said to herself, turning to go indoors again. 'Thank God 'at most about here's i' shelter. There'll noän be a soul I know out on yon sea to-night.'

It was growing colder now—much colder. A little later Damian Aldenmede, sauntering down to the beach to smoke his last cigar, was surprised by the change in the temperature.

'If I remain at Ulvstan much longer I shall have to write and ask Carel to send me a greatcoat or two,' he said audibly as he increased his pace.

Still he remained there, walking up and down between the Ness and the Forecliff, now facing north and now south, but finding not much difference whichever way he turned. It was a strange night. The mere air, which was hardly stirred as yet, seemed to have the force and the peculiar biting quality of a strong north-easter, though such wind as there was came off the land. And there was no change either on the ocean or in the sky. The cloud-mass still loomed above, seeming as if fain to drop its gloomy weight upon the wide, and dark, and gloomy sea.

At last the sigh arose—the long, low, tristful sigh, the first breath of the storm, which seemed to sweep across the face of the water with a sadness like to that of the sigh that is heard before the last breath passes from out the lips of the dying.

The storm sigh rises, it sweeps onward, not coming to a moan, not fluttering or hurrying the lightest wavelet. There is no visible sign—yet you see it; there is only the faintest audible sound, yet you not only hear it, but, hearing, you shiver, and, if you have dread for anyone, turn faint for the strife to be.

Then the pause comes—a dead stillness, as if the natural progress of the world were arrested. One might imagine that the earth itself had ceased to move.

But this is only for awhile; sometimes it is a very brief while, sometimes it is longer. Of this evening it was afterwards said that this strange interval had lasted so long that it was thought that the storm might be passing by without breaking on this part of the north-eastern coast.

It was at the very beginning of the calm period that a little band of men came out from the small inn on the quay, known as the Cod and Lobster. They were fishermen, all of them: and two, Jim Tyas and John Scurr (Lang Jack, the name he was better known by), were David Andoe's mates, and each held shares in the *Star of the North*. David was not among them. The *Star of the North* was with a portion of the herring-fleet off Danesborough; and David, with Will Scurr and Luke Furniss, had remained on board. The two others had walked over to Ulvstan for the night, as they often did. They would return at daybreak.



Most of the evening they had spent in the little inn, smoking long clay pipes, drinking muddy beer, denouncing trawlers and steamers, gossiping of this neighbour and of that, but more than all of David Andoe and his trouble. They were angry, but not excited, when they went out, so Ann Stamper, the lone old woman who was landlady of the Cod and Lobster, had said afterward, and there her testimony ended. She knew nothing more.

They sauntered on awhile, the four men ; then Lang Jack went home, as he was in the habit of doing, having a wife capable of eliciting the 'reason why' when he did not. It was after ten now, yet the others stood about on the narrow, rugged quay, and then went down to the beach, still smoking, still angrily discussing the manner and method of the revenge they meant to take when opportunity served. One was for adopting the time-honoured and effective process known as 'tarring and feathering ;' another, in a moment of bitterness, had suggested that the Squire's son should be decoyed on board some vessel in the offing and subjected to the punishment known as keel-hauling.\* But since Hartas Theyn had one day done some small kindness to Samson Verrill's little son, Sampey had demurred to these more violent measures.

'Let's give him a duckin', an' ha' done wi' it,' Sampey said. 'Let's pop him under water at the point o' the Ness at high-tide, and then let him go.'

And thereupon Jim Tyas had given expression to his opinion that Verrill was a sneak and a spiritless coward. Sampey was not a man to bear such an accusation tamely. His pipe was dashed down, his jacket off, before the others were aware of his intention.

'Come on—we'll fight that oot, thoo an' me!' he said with subdued passion.

Of course, Jim Tyas was ready. Richard Reah had no thought of interfering ; and in the light of later events it seemed almost sad that interference should have come in any shape whatever. Before the first blow had been struck, a step came up quickly behind ; a stranger's voice broke in hurriedly :

'What's up ? Who's goin' to fight in the dark, an' at this time o' night ? What's the row about ?'

There was yet no moon ; but a rift in the heavy purple-black cloud disclosed a steely glare that enabled the fishermen to recognise that this stranger was no other than the man whose conduct they had been discussing, whom they had been desiring to get into their power by any means. And now, when the hot blood of anger was already coursing along their veins, it was surely the worst of moments for him to come in contact with them. Before he knew what had happened he was struggling with the three men—three

\* For the benefit of the uninitiated it may be explained that keel-hauling was a mode of punishment used at sea in former times. The offender, having heavy laden weights attached to his feet, was dragged by means of ropes to and fro under the keel of the ship.



against one—and two of them certainly mad against him. For Dick Reah had thought of Bab almost as long as David Andoe had done; though a certain rude sense of honour had restrained him from expressing his preference by other than indefinite ways and means. Yet Bab knew, and he was aware that she knew; and the knowledge kept up a certain amount of uneasy sensation on either side. Certainly the feeling he had for her added to the strength of the present moment's passion.

Sampey Verrill's voice was the only one heard above the strife:

'Let him hev a chance!' Verrill pleaded. 'It's noän fair, three again one! . . . An' give him a chance o' speakin'! Let's hear if he's owt to saäy for hissel'. Let him speak!'

'Speak!' exclaimed Jim Tyas breathlessly. His blood was up as thoroughly as that of Hartas Theyn, who was struggling to defend himself in no unscientific manner. 'Speak! He's spokken ower much. . . . We'll put a stop tiv his speakin'!'

'Mak' him promise!' shouted Dick Reah. 'Mak him promise 'at he'll niver oppen his lips to Bab Burdas ageeän; 'at he'll niver come near her, nor even near the hoose she lives in. . . . Give him that chance. Mak' him promise; an' then give him a good dressin' and let him go.'

The suggestion seemed fair enough, but it was not readily acted upon. The strife continued for a few moments because the impetus accumulated did not permit of its being stopped all at once. The fishermen had been trying to bring Hartas to the ground, but, strange to say, they only succeeded after some difficulty. He had more muscular strength than they had anticipated, and he had some knowledge of the science of self-defence. At last, however, they were successful, and Reah repeated his suggestion.

'Ya hear what Dick says?' Jim Tyas asked, when Hartas was on his feet again. 'Ya hear that? If ya'll promise we'll let ya go, for te-neet. Ah'll noän saäy it means peace for iver; but ya can goä for this time, if ya promise—promise to keep away fra Bab Burdas, fra the hoose she lives in—naäy, fra the varry toon!'

'I will not make one of those promises,' Hartas replied firmly and clearly.

He was not blind to his position. He knew himself to be at the mercy of three strong, unscrupulous, vengeful men—men to whom revenge was as a natural instinct, not to be subdued without dread of the slur of effeminacy.

Yet he did not yield.

'I will not make one of those promises,' he said; and the reply came quickly:

'You'll either promise or you'll go where there'll be no more chance o' promisin'.'

'Then I choose the latter.'

'You do?'

'I do.'

'Wi' yer eyes oppen?'



'More open than yours appear to be.'

'Then hev at him, mates!' Jim Tyas exclaimed savagely, preparatory to suiting his action to his word; but Sampey made another effort to arrest Jim's wild, mad impetuosity.

'It'll noän do to murdther the fool—remember that; an' that'll be the end on't afore we know, if we doän't tak' care. . . . Noo think a minnit, Jim! An' let's thry this—let's put the idiot into yon boat o' Dandy Will's, an' row him oot to sea, an' leave him there—leave him if he won't promise, fetch him back if he will!'

The suggestion was no sooner made than steps were taken to carry it into effect. Hartas Theyn was bound with the ropes that were only too ready, and then placed in one of the tiny, gaily-painted little pleasure-boats that had been moored alongside the quay. The oars had been removed when the boat was made fast. Very speedily the men launched it, placed themselves in another and a larger one, took the little craft in tow, and made ready for starting. At the last moment Sampey Verrill shouted:

'Promise!'

'Never!'

Away the two boats went, the fishermen pulling as if their lives depended on their exertions, and in a few minutes they were out upon the wide black ocean, full of revenge, of triumph, of determination.

And Hartas Theyn's determination was as strong as theirs. Though he lay in the boat, bound hand and foot, shivering with cold now that the struggle was over and he was out upon the dark heaving water, he yet kept his courage.

He was aware that the battle would be fought out at sea, too far from the land for any sound to be heard, any help afforded; yet no thought of breaking his resolve came to him. No promise should be wrung from him by such means as this.

With all his faults, he was yet no coward, and the stubbornness natural to his race might almost be counted as a virtue in a crisis like this.

He knew that the present action was the result of no deep-laid plot; yet had it been so it could hardly have been more effective for the purpose of the men who were concerned in it. They were still pulling to the utmost of their power. Hartas, raising himself in the boat, watched the receding lights of the Bight, and knew that they were going rather to the north than to the south, though he was well aware that this would signify but little to him if they fulfilled their threat. And that they would fulfil it he knew but too certainly.

Till now that strange calm had lasted, brooding ominously upon earth and sea; but Hartas became aware that change was impending. A breeze was rising, beginning to sigh and wail; a chill, piercing breeze it was, and the lapping of the waves by the very edge of the little boat was a dreary sound in the ear of the man who lay there anticipating the coming ordeal, and nerving himself



for it with what strength was left him. But even yet he was unshaken by any thought of yielding, of surrender.

If it came to the worst, he could die, and some day Bab might come to know how and why he had died. That was the one comforting thought that he had ; she might come to know, she might even regret. And strange to say it did comfort him, even this—that by his death he might win

‘ Such tears  
As would have made life precious.

Strange it is, and sad, that a human life should so often miss the one human preciousness—the preciousness of love, with all the sympathy, all the compassion, all the sustenance that a worthy love includes !

Strange and sad, for you, for me, if we have so missed that best lasting good ; stranger and sadder far to have known it and lost it ! Ah, that bitter, that unspeakably bitter losing !

Was Barbara Burdas to find how bitter it was ? Were there any others who might see and suffer, but *too late* ?

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

‘ ALONE, ALONE, ON A WIDE, WIDE SEA !’

‘ Then all was still. Upon me fell the night,  
And a voice whispered to me, “ *Life is Past.* ”’

JOHN PAYNE.

STILL the two boats went onward over the dark heaving sea ; the three rowers rowing swiftly and silently as might be, under the dark silent sky.

It was past midnight now ; the heaving water was heaving more strongly against the sides of the little boat ; the heavy pall of cloud was beginning to break and scatter and drift wildly across the heavens ; now disclosing a glimpse of the wan moon that was riding high by this time, yet veiling her face, as if not wishing to look upon that scene of cruelty, of inhumanity.

Hartas Theyn was still awaiting the coming moment with sufficient fortitude ; and almost he persuaded himself that he was indifferent. Truth to say, young as he was, he was very weary life had never been a very happy or very pleasant thing to him. He had been to blame, as he knew, and had confessed. He had lived idly, carelessly, thoughtlessly ; and, worse than all (it seemed worse now in this hour of testing), he had resisted the help of those who would have helped him from himself. This was the painful sting that lent its piercing to the chill of the wind on the midnight sea.

Yet it did not embitter his thought or emotion. When at last the rowers laid their oars on the rowlocks, and after brief consultation turned to him, though his determination was as resolute



as before, he was less vehement in the expression of it. He did not even take the trouble to raise himself from the side of the boat in which he lay bound.

Unfortunately Jim Tyas was the spokesman ; the rancorous and truculent one of the three, though it may be that Dick Reah was not far behind in evil will.

'Here's a last chance for ya !' Jim shouted, standing up in the stern of the larger boat, and hauling the grating tow-rope as he spoke so as to bring the two boats nearer. 'A last chance ! Give us yer word an' honour 'at ya'll keep away fra' Barbara Burdas, an' fra' the Forecliff, an' we'll row ya back to the quay wi' niver another word ! But refuse, an' you're left driftin' here, oot at sea, ov a dark night, with never so much as a sail i' sight, an' wi' never a bite o' meat, nor a sup o' water ; left to drift te the north, or te the south, as wind and wave may take you—or what's likelier far, left to drift downwards to the bottomless pit. Tak' yer choice.'

'I've done so already.'

'An' yer mind's noän changed ?'

'Never for a second.'

'It may be as you're ower much of an idiot to tak' in what we're meanin',' Dick Reah broke in with characteristic impetuosity. 'Think again, ya fool ! What'll ya do two hours after this—ay, or less nor that, when ya find the waves chopping ower the sides o' that bit o' boat you're in as if she were a cockle-shell ? What'll you do then ? Think on it for a moment—that is, if ya've brain anuff to tak' it in. Think of hoo ya'll feel when ya're goin' doon to the bottom, an' niver a soul near ya, even to see when or where ya go.'

'My brain can see all I wish to see, thank you,' Hartas replied, speaking with a dignity, a calmness so unusual as to be a surprise to himself. He had not even raised his head as he spoke, and his tones were untainted by any harshness, any defiance. A keen instinct might have discerned an underlying sadness ; but no such instinct was there out upon the dark water. Still, Samson Verrill was moved to make yet another effort.

'Look here, you son of a squire—a fine squire's son you are ! But all the same, look here—this is suicide you're committin'.'

'Or you are committing murder, which is it ?' Hartas asked calmly.

'An' what o' that ?' Jim Tyas asked mockingly. 'It 'ud not be the first murder done on the seas atween the points of Ulvstan Bight—no, not the first by a lot. There's more sorts o' murder nor one. An' who'll know o' this, think ya ?'

Hartas hesitated for one impressive moment ; then he said quietly emphatically :

'It will be known. There will be evidence you little dream of.'

'What might move him to speak so, he could hardly have told ; yet the quiet, oracular tone in which he spoke was not without its effect upon the men who heard. The night was still a dark one ;



the moon was behind a bank of thick cloud ; the wind was wailing sadly, wildly, coldly. Sampey Verrill, with only his shore-going jacket on, was shivering in a way he was not much acquainted with. The wind he knew, and the sea he knew ; but strong and deep emotion was something to be dreaded.

'Are ya *mad*?' Sampey asked, coming to the stern of the boat, and standing a little behind Jim Tyas. 'Are ya clean daft? Ya've only got to saäy a word, an' back ya'll go, wi' no more harm upon ya nor if ya'd been sittin' i' yer oän arm-chair.'

'Oh, he'll sit on a sofy, *he* will, wiv a sixpenny cigar atween his lips,' Dick Reah interposed by way of aside.

And Sampey Verrill added, perhaps not without undertone of warning to his word : 'The boat'll do better nor even a sofy. It'll be more like a rockin' chair by-and-by.'

But the patience of Jim Tyas, never a large store at the best, was being rapidly exhausted.

'We've had anuff o' this!' he exclaimed, moving away with an impatient gesture. Then, turning again to the stern of the boat, taking a huge knife from his pocket, and unclasping it with ostentation, he said, speaking loudly, emphatically : 'Ah'll give ya a last chance, an' then yer life'll be i' yer oän hand. Will ya mak' that promise, or will ya not?'

The answer came clearly, deliberately :

'*I will not.*'

No more was said just then. None dared to prevent Jim Tyas from cutting the rope that held the smaller boat in tow ; strand by strand, and with scientific manipulation, he did it. . . . There was only a last fibre.'

'Speak, ya fool!'

But no one spoke.

Hartas Theyn felt the moment when the last strand was severed, the boat set adrift ; he felt it through his very soul as with a shock, yet comparatively but a slight shock. It was much as if some one had opened a vein in his body, from out of which his life would slowly but surely flow.

For perhaps one minute the two boats had drifted apart ; yet the space between was a wide one. The sky seemed darker and wilder ; the waters blacker and more turbulent. Then once more a voice came from out the distant gloom :

'Will ya saäy that word, ya born idiot?'

It was Samson Verrill's voice, and there was an undertone of strong entreaty in it ; but no response was made.

For a long while they listened, but there came never any e sponse.



## CHAPTER XXIX.

'HAST THOU THEN WRAPPED US IN THY SHADOW, DEATH?'

And yet that hollow moaning will not go,  
Nor the old fears that with the sea abide.'

WILLIAM M. W. CALL.

As some of the older people had expected, that night was one of the wildest nights ever known on the north-east coast of England.

The story of it—or rather a mere outline of the story—may be read in the local chronicles of that day. It is told in the usual brief, journalistic fashion how the sloop *Joanna*, of Sunderland, came ashore at Flamboro'; how her crew were drowned, all but the little cabin-boy, who was washed ashore, stunned and senseless, and awoke to learn that his father had gone down in that same squall only a few miles farther to the south.

The next wreck to come ashore was the schooner *Viking*. Though the vessel was registered as sailing from Hild's Haven, the crew were all of them Ulvstan men. There were six of them—a father, his brother, his three sons, and a cousin. They had been caught out at sea suddenly during that wild night, and almost immediately the little vessel had sprung a leak. It had probably seemed to the crew, in the first moments of their danger, that it was a matter of congratulation that distress had come upon them so near to their own home. They made at once for the Bight of Ulvstan; but in those days the men of the Bight had no help to offer; no lifeboat was stationed there, no rocket-apparatus; they could only go up to the cliff-top with the wives and children, the parents and sisters of the men in danger, and watch there. They presently saw that the crew had 'taken up aloft.' But the sea was breaking over the rigging. One tremendous wave was seen to wash several of them off into the boiling surf; this was about daybreak, and at last the ship went down. Before she quite sank, the top-gallant-mast was seen to be out of the water, with men clinging to it, in sight of their agonized and powerless friends. But the storm went on raging; and at last, one by one, the poor fellows were seen to drop off, to battle with the furiously-dashing sea below for a moment or two, and then to go under.

If you should ask for any of the Burrells of Ulvstan Bight now, you would receive for answer, '*The sea gat him!*'

An hour or two later, when the crimson of the rising sun had ceased to flush the tossing surf with fiery colour, another vessel came in sight, remained visible for a few minutes, and then suddenly disappeared with all hands on board. Later the hull of this brigantine washed up, and her name-board proved her to have been the *Marie Sieden* of Rotterdam.

The captain, a young man of not more than five-and-twenty, was found lashed to the helm, his right arm broken, a pitiless bruise on his left temple. There was still a smile on the dead placid face,



A lovely miniature on ivory, a portrait of a young girl, golden-haired (a rich red gold it was), blue-eyed, crimson-lipped, was near the heart of the drowned captain of the *Marie Sieden*. Two days later strangers laid him to rest in the quiet churchyard at Market Yarburch ; and he was not unwept.

Naturally enough these days of storm and stress were days of great excitement in Ulvstan Bight. When the tide was out the fisher-folk gathered about the sands and the foot of the Forecliff ; when it was high and the storm was at its worst, they went up to the quay and to the ledges of shaly rock that ran to the southward of the Bight. This they did especially when any sail was in sight, watching the labouring of the distant vessel as it passed from point to point, wondering what its fate might be. But very few ships passed by, and these were screw-steamers for the most part, more equal to the fight with wind and wave than the wooden-built, canvas-spiced vessels that awoke so much more interest. It was the oak or teak built brig, the white sail, that aroused the fears of every heart watching in or near the Bight of Ulvstan.

All day the excitement was kept up in an intermittent way, and at nightfall it increased. There were two or three vessels in sight ; one seemed as if it might hold on its way with some chance of safety ; the second, a brigantine, appeared to be driving more or less at the mercy of the waves ; a third, the *Lady Godiva* of Danesborough, a schooner with only four men on board, was evidently trying to make for the beach when the night began to fall, and the chance for her crew, with that awful sea whitening all the bay, seemed very small indeed—they must surely know how small, those poor storm-driven souls whose own home was not so very far away. Yes ; they would know all the coast, its dangers, its advantages, its possibilities. Yet they were trying to run aground in Ulvstan Bight, that was evident.

It seemed as if not only the population of Ulvstan was there to watch the on-coming of the little schooner, but people from all the neighbourhood round about. Barbara Burdas, with two of the three little lads beside her, was out upon the Forecliff. Old Ephraim was down below answering Mrs. Kerne's brusque questions with a quite equal brusqueness, yet he was not at all averse from receiving a shilling for his apparently grudgingly-given information. Jim Tyas, with Dick Reah, Samson Verrill, and a dozen others, were by the edge of the quay, waiting in readiness to do aught that might be done, waiting patiently, watching closely, almost silently. If they grieved that they could do so little, their grief was not audible.

More than one there present noticed how downcast some few of these fishermen seemed that day ; but none dreamed that they had other cause for being dispirited than the very natural sympathy they must be feeling for those in danger. Their close watching was approved, their patient waiting commended. Though no boat might be launched in such a sea, yet all else that might be done in



readiness to help was done, and with an almost passionate eagerness. And no one was handier in coiling ropes than Samson Verrill ; no one took more trouble to see that the tar-barrels were rightly prepared than Dick Reah. Jim Tyas was more sullen, more restless ; and shook off poor Nan when she went down to the quay with some hot coffee in a can for him, with a harshness of manner he was never to repent of.

Nan's eyes filled with tears as she turned away ; and others saw and were sorry, even some of the roughest of them felt pain. They knew that Nan was not well just now, and that she had fought her way down to the quay at one of the wildest moments of the gale, with a furious rain beating upon her ; all were things to be remembered afterward—too late.

Yet it was Jim Tyas who improvised the life-line that was to be flung on board the schooner if she came near enough to be helped so ; he it was who kept to the quay and to the Forecliff, while others went home to snatch a hasty meal.

'He's noän such a bad 'un after all, isn't Jim?' said some of the old fishermen, watching his alertness with a certain pride as in some way belonging to themselves. He was not much liked, he had often made himself to be dreaded, though his temper was rather of the bitter than of the passionate type. Yet he could be violent enough on occasion. He was best known for his daring, his wild and reckless daring ; courage, one called it ; fool-hardiness, another ; yet none had ever doubted his desperate bravery. More than one man living in the Bight knew well that he owed his life to the eager temerity of Jim Tyas.

They were watching there in the deepening twilight. Groups of sailors and fisher-folk went down on the as yet uncovered beach ; the women and children were for the most part on the quay. There was a carriage or two at the bottom of the hilly road that led down into the Bight from Yarva, and from the moorland townlet of Kildwick. It seemed as if few could rest in their own warm and comfortable homes on such a night as this.

All day Damian Aldenmede had been there. At first he had tried to sketch, to put on canvas the fierce, wild rolling and curving of the waves—waves more dread, more magnificent than any he had ever seen ; but he had soon to desist. It was like trying to make artistic capital of some influence that was appalling, impressing his inmost nature. In a word, he was too greatly overcome by the force of the spirit of the storm to make use of his talent. He had known nothing like this before.

He could not paint or sketch ; he could hardly think to any definite end. What responsive man or woman can ever use the power of thought to any intelligible purpose during a hurricane that is sweeping both land and sea ? The least sensitive person must surely be unstrung. The sound alone—the loud, continuous, nerve-wearing, brain-racking sound must of itself be sufficient to untune every string of the chords of human life. And then there is always



some dread present, either in the background, or in the forefront of sensation. And it is a strange, peculiar, magnetic kind of dread, for some of us much akin to that which strains the soul when the earth is all a-tremble beneath one's feet. . . . It is only when the storm has ceased, only when the wind lies dead upon land and sea, only when the ocean is stilled to an almost appalling stillness, that one can at all measure the depth of prostration one has reached. If the tension be taken off suddenly the reaction is almost indescribable.

Damian Aldenmede was all unaccustomed to the strain caused by a storm at the sea's marge. He could not realize it, or understand it altogether, and consequently he gave to other perturbing causes more than their due share in his perturbation.

Twice or thrice during that day he had seen Canon Godfrey in the Bight; once he had met him coming out from the cottage where the poor little shipwrecked lad was lying, conscious now of the fact that he had been left fatherless, and, since his captain was gone and his shipmates, almost friendless. The Canon grasped the artist's hand warmly, hurriedly. 'We must look to the little stranger,' he said, passing on to the next cottage, where an old woman, mother of one of the drowned Burrell family, was sitting alone, stunned, tearless, resentful, waiting for some one to listen to her raving against the ways of God and man. No such task had ever had to be met by Hugh Godfrey as that which fell to him under the low red roof of the Burrells.

The long, gray, stormy twilight, how it seemed to linger that evening! The groups of anxious people gathered and grew; the great waves rose, and tossed, and fell in long, whitening lines upon the beach. The little schooner was still struggling bravely, but ah! how slowly, toward the land where alone was safety.

And now once again the Canon and Damian Aldenmede met; it was at the point where the road that crossed the Forecliff joined the path that led to the new promenade. There was a tiny wooden bridge across the beck that ran down from the moors above to the sea. Close at hand a coastguardsman's cottage stood behind trim garden palings. Some fisher-folk were grouped about the little gate, the gray road that led up the hill behind was lined on either hand by people seeking the slight shelter afforded by the rising ground. Everywhere the same subdued excitement was noticeable.

'What do you think?' the artist was asking. 'What do you think of the chances of the schooner? Is there any hope for . . .?'

Mr. Aldenmede's question was never finished. There was a sudden commotion among the little crowd by the coastguardsman's gate; a stepping aside as if to make way; a murmur of consternation; a white figure flying down the dark road! The Canon turned in instant anxiety, and the artist's sympathy was with him. Then, all at once, as if Thorhilda had known where her uncle must be, she flew to him, clinging to his arm with pathetic fervour of tenderness.



‘Is it you? *Is it* Uncle Hugh?’ she cried, gasping between each word, being so very breathless. ‘Is Hartas with you? . . . Is he? . . . Surely he is?’

She could say no more just then, and the Rector, seeing how it was with her, placed her arm within his own, and drew her away from the gaping little crowd that had gathered round.

‘Come with me,’ he said gently. ‘Come into Mackenzie’s cottage. . . . Aldenmede, will you see if Mrs. Mackenzie has come home?’

### CHAPTER XXX.

#### NAN TYAS AND HER TROUBLES.

‘Let not the waters close above my head,  
Uphold me that I sink not in this mire :  
For flesh and blood are frail and sore afraid ;  
And young I am, unsatisfied and young,  
With memories, hopes, with cravings all unfed,  
My song half sung, its sweetest notes unsung,  
All plans cut short, all possibilities.’

CHRISTINA ROSSETTI.

THUS invited, the artist was well content to accompany them, to see Miss Theyn seated by the cottage fire, trying to collect herself, to overcome her emotion ; but it was evident that these things were difficult to her.

‘Have you not seen Hartas?’ she asked, still speaking with effort. ‘*He is missing!* He has not been at home all day, all night! Some time yesterday he left the Grange, and they have not seen him since! . . . Rhoda is at the Rectory, with Aunt Milicent. . . . She has walked all the way from the Grange alone and in this storm to see if we could tell her anything about him. . . . Poor Rhoda, she cares so much more about him than I ever dreamed she did. . . . She guessed when I was there yesterday that I had something particular to say to him. As I told you, he was out ; but I ought to have gone before. . . . I ought to have done something. *I was asked to warn him!* . . . And I did not. . . . How shall I bear it?—*how shall I bear?* . . . What can they have done, those enemies of his?’

‘You know nothing more than you told me of before?’ the Canon asked. ‘You told me that Nan Tyas had intimated that some harm was intended him ; you know no more?’

‘I know nothing but that. Surely it is enough. And I did not forget—not for a second. But I wanted to see Hartas *alone*, to talk to him a little, that is, to appeal to him. . . . You have not seen him since——’

‘Not since that moment I told you something of—the moment when we parted on the sands, and he gave me such hope of his future.’

It was strange how the Canon’s heart sank, remembering that hour. Of this he did not speak, but for a moment he left the



room. Thorhilda had seen that the blue, kindly eyes were bright with unshed tears.

She made a momentary effort. 'You have not seen my brother, Mr. Aldenmede, I need hardly ask?' she said.

Then, worn out by physical fatigue, by mental strain, she closed her eyes and sank back in her chair; and he saw by the dread pallor on her face that she was unconscious. The sight was strangely overwhelming, almost paralyzing.

'My child! *my child!*' he exclaimed, in a subdued, agonizing tone, as he took her cold hands in his and chafed them. It was only a moment or two before consciousness began to return. Her colour came back with a sudden betraying flush. Had she heard? And what exactly had he said? He hardly knew. Canon Godfrey was re-entering the little room; Mrs. Mackenzie was coming with a cup of tea; Miss Theyn, recovering herself, was asking:

'What can we do? . . . Uncle Hugh, you will do *something?* for my sake you will do something. I feel as if it were all on my head; on my own head. Remember that. I ought to have made more effort, but I did not dream of anything happening yet; how should I? And now it may be too late—it may be! . . . What *can* we do?'

'There are some things to be done at once,' the Canon replied, with peremptoriness. 'You must, in the first place, take this tea. . . . You have acted with sufficient unwisdom for one day, Thorda dear. The carriage could have been brought round in ten minutes, and in the end you would have been here much sooner. Now you must please obey me. Mr. Aldenmede will get a cab; he will take you home in it, and then he will come back, and help me to do all that may be done. . . . You see I am counting upon you in a very cavalier fashion,' he added, turning to Aldenmede. 'But this is no time for deliberate courtesies. . . . I need not ask if you will do all you can?'

The artist was not one to deal in words at such a moment.

'I will do all I may do, and gladly,' he replied. But the restrained, eager fervidness of his tone said more than many eloquent phrases.

It was about this time that somehow, no one ever knew exactly how, the news was flashed about Ulvstan Bight that Hartas Theyn was missing; that he had been missing since the previous day. . . . This was Miss Theyn's motive for flying all the way from Yarburgh Rectory on a stormy evening with only a white shawl for protection. The sensation seemed to mingle itself with that that was gathering about the little schooner that was struggling to reach the Bight with her crew of four exhausted men—each man now lashed to the rigging. Once, about an hour earlier, a flash had been seen; the dull boom of a signal gun had struck upon the ears of the waiting, helpless, saddened crowd. That was the last effort, the last appeal. And no answer could be made—*none*. There was no lifeboat in that little bay.



Had a boat been there, there were fifty men from whom a crew of twelve might have been chosen.

Surely all the people of the neighbourhood must now have been there by the sea's wild margin! Gray-headed men and women, who had lived by the sea, and toiled by it, and suffered by it; little children, whose brief life was all bound up with the sea-life of the place; young men, strong, anxious, eager to fight for the lives of these men, their fellows, bound helplessly there in the rigging of the drifting ship, yet having no means of fighting; young maidens excited by sympathy, prayerful, tearful, calm, hysterical—all these and others were there; emotion mingling with emotion; thoughts, hopes, regrets, repentance finding expression in that unwonted moment that might have remained unexpressed for ever in the routine of daily existence.

The twilight yet lingered; the tide was not yet at its highest. The little vessel, with her black hull, could be seen quite distinctly as she tossed there in the white surf. She yet held together, and she was beating in; these were the sole grounds for hoping.

Intense as were the hopes, the fears, that held that multitude of people in a common thrall, the news that the Rector's niece had brought to the Bight was by no means ignored. All at once the feeling that some dark deed had been perpetrated seemed to seize the people. No one knew how this idea had arisen, yet it was there; and almost immediately spoken of more or less openly.

'*They've* done it—them Andoes,' old Dan Furniss said at once. 'Ne'er a worse woman lived nor old Suze, an' they're all of a breed, 'cept David; an' he's like anuff a changlin', whoä knows? Wi' such a family as yon—whoä knows? But that's neither here nor there! What ha' they done wi' the young Squire? *He's* noän sa much, or he'd never ha' set his heart on a flither-picker! But for all that they're scarce within the law o' the land i' murderin' him! . . . An' whoä knows?'

Such were the words, the hints, the suggestions, that flew round the Bight on that wild autumn evening.

Did they hear, those three men who had rowed out to sea the night before, towing a tiny boat which they had cut adrift miles from the land?

Did they need to hear any spoken word? Was not the voice of the stormy sea as it rolled and broke and thundered at the foot of the cliffs—was not this sufficiently informing?

Who can say what it was that was lending such desperation to their effort to save life—the lives of those comparative strangers that fate was driving into their hands?

As everyone saw, the men of Ulvstan were doing their utmost. A tar-barrel had been lighted on the beach, indicating the spot toward which the schooner's crew might aim with some hope of deliverance—supposing any power of aiming anywhere were left to them. Very soon after this it was perceived that they had abandoned themselves to the mercy of wind and wave.



The gun had been fired at sea ; the burning tar-barrel had answered on the shore ; and now out upon the Balderstone—a long, dark tongue of low-lying rock that stretched across the bay at a right angle from the cliff, some fifty men and lads of the place were assembled, a few with ropes, a few with flares of blazing pitch or tar. They were all anxious, all ready, a few pressed forward in a very passion of desperate eagerness.

It was just then that Nan Tyas and Bab Burdas met unexpectedly on a shelving part of the Forecliff. Nan was sobbing, shivering, trying to cover herself with a little red woollen handkerchief that was about her neck. Bab saw and understood, and was all compassion in a moment.

‘Ya daft lass!’ she exclaimed, unfastening her own big warm Scotch plaid, and pinning it in motherly fashion about the young fishwife’s shoulders. ‘Ya daft body! What are ya doin’ here? You’ve no right to be out o’ doors at all! One’ll hear tell o’ ya bein’ i’ bed the next thing!’

Nan’s first answer was a deeper sob ; then at last words came.

‘Eh, but you’re a good friend, Bab, an’ kind! As for stayin’ indoors, it’s noän sa easy at a time like this!’

‘You’re gettin’ nervous, Nan, an’ no wonder! What’s your mother about ’at she’s not lookin’ after ya?’

‘My mother!’ Nan exclaimed, checking her tears for the moment! and lifting her face with a look of scorn upon it. ‘My mother ; . . . Eh, well, she *is* my mother, so mebbe I’d better say no more ; but it’s little ya know o’ her if ya think she’d put herself oot o’ the way for me. . . . If I thought I’d ever live to be as hard to a bairn o’ mine, I’d wish to die to-night, afore to-morrow. . . . But what am I sayin’? She *is* my mother!’

‘Don’t say no more of her, Nan—not just now,’ Bab urged gently and kindly. ‘You’re noän dependent on her now. . . . Surely Jim’s kind anuff?’

Bab had no idea of being inquisitive. She was only wondering how far she need go in case of Nan being in any trouble or danger.

For awhile Nan did not reply. Then she said sadly and slowly : ‘Off an’ on he’s kind ; there’s worse nor he is.’

It was evident that she wished to say no more ; and Bab understood and was silent in her compassion, but she drew a little nearer to Nan, and watched her in the motherly protecting way that was an instinct always, when anyone needed her care. Nan was well able to appreciate kindness.

And still the storm seemed to be increasing. The few stars that had appeared in the sky were obscured, the heavens became one black mass of cloud, and suddenly from out the mass there came a vivid, blinding flash of lightning, disclosing the scene in the Bight with painful clearness. The schooner was still there, her dark hull rocking slowly in the white waves, her masts still standing, and apparently two at least of the crew had descended from the rigging.



The crowd of men were still clustering upon the tongue of rock : some of them seemed quite near the ship. In point of fact, they were holding a difficult conversation with the master and mate of the *Lady Godiva*. The lightning flash silenced the speakers for the moment.

Then came the thunder, loud, dread, long-continued, seeming as if it silenced all things.

‘You *mun* go home, Nan !’ Bab urged again, her sympathy roused to the uttermost by the uncontrollable tremor of the girl at her side. ‘You’re none well ! You *mun* go home.’

‘Let ma wait a bit longer—just a bit,’ Nan begged with a new quietness, a new gentleness. ‘I’d like to see what comes o’ yon schooner.’

## CHAPTER XXXI.

### ‘AT MIDNIGHT, WHEN THE CRY WAS MADE.’

“Love me in sinners and in saints,  
In each who needs or faints,—  
Lord, I will love Thee as I can  
In every brother man.

“All sore, all crippled, all who ache,  
Tend all for My dear sake,—  
All for Thy sake, Lord : I will see  
In every sufferer Thee.”

CHRISTINA ROSSETTI.

It was just at that moment that old Ephraim Burdas came up to the point of the Forecliff where Barbara and Nan were standing. Bab saw at once that he was somewhat excited, and longing to unburden himself of the cause of his excitement.

‘What’s i’ the wind noo, granfather ?’ she asked. ‘What have ya heerd that’s new ? Nought ‘at’s good such a day as this, I’m fearin’.’

‘Good or bad—whoä can saäy ?’ exclaimed the old man. ‘Think ov a laädy like yon, dressed all i’ white, fra the crown of her head te the sole of her foot, flyin’ doon fra Yarburgh Rectory, all aleän, an’ wi’ niver a hat nor a bonnet on her heäd ! Think on it ! An’ a storm like this ragin’—wind an’ raäin, an’ thunder an’ leetnin’, an’ slush an’ mud—think on it ! An’ what’s she done it for ? All acause yon scapegrace brother of hers is missin’. Missin’ ? Nea doobt on it ; an’ missin’ he’ll be ! Missin’ ? Some o’ them Andoes could tell what sort o’ missing it means. They’re bad anuff for owght—all but Dave ; an’ as for Jim Tyas. . . .’

‘Gran’father !’ Bab exclaimed warmly, feeling the heavy weight of poor Nan, as the young fishwife reeled and fell against her. For all Bab’s strength it was as much as she could do to sustain the half-conscious form. She had no time or opportunity to realize the stun and hurt that the old man’s words had been to her own



brain. But almost immediately Nan made a great effort—there was need for it—and recovered herself sufficiently to say :

‘Keep a quiet tongue i’ yer head, Barbie. I’ll tell ya what Ah know ; it isn’t much, but I’ll tell ya by-an’-by.’

That was all Nan could say just then ; and she spoke the truth in saying that she did not know much.

One thing everybody knew. Dandy Will’s little boat had been missed at daybreak ; but that such a tiny craft should have broken from its moorings and drifted out to sea during such a night as that just passed was far too commonplace a matter to attract much remark. Why had not the owner taken the trouble to do what the owners of other boats had done—draw his little possession up to the side of the Forecliff, and turn her upside down among the grass and the gray-green bents ? Who could pity him ?

Perhaps it was fortunate for Bab that she had Nan to think of and care for in this first moment. Still she began to feel as if her own strength were being taken from her ; as if she must be growing cold and white and ill. Miss Theyn was there in the Bight ? Her brother Hartas was missing ? People were suspecting foul play ? Surely her little world was crumbling beneath her feet ? Yes, certainly it was well that Bab had to give the best energy she had left to the suffering girl by her side.

‘You’ll go home now, Nan!’ she said entreatingly. But Nan was not yet to be persuaded.

‘Hoo ya taik !’ she replied, with the mingled tremor of cold and fear and pain in her voice. ‘Go home, an’ him doon there, bent o’ risking’ his life as he were never bent afore ! *It’s been on him all day, that desperateness ! . . .* Eh me ! it’s been the strangest day o’ my life—the strangest of all. . . . God send Ah may never know such another !’

Sobs prevented Nan’s utterance of any further foreboding. By this time the lightning was flashing across the bay with some frequency, the thunder rolling and crashing with appalling nearness ; the white waves were still flying and tossing down below.

Every now and then the schooner could be seen ; the long dark Balderstone, with a few men yet remaining upon it, lingering there because of their humane errand. There were not more than five or six of them now ; the rest had fled with the rising of the tide, warning the others that the deep gutter that surrounded the rock was already filled with water. Jim Tyas and Samson Verrill were among those who remained, beseeching the crew of the *Lady Godiva* to leave the vessel while yet there was time.

Again Jim Tyas was the spokesman. He knew the captain of the little ship, knew that he was part owner as well as captain, and he knew also that, for economy’s sake, she had not been insured. If she were lost that night, left to the mercy of the wild waters of Ulvstan Bight, all was lost so far as Jonas Lee was concerned. He would be a penniless man. His crew knew this, and held by their captain bravely.



'There's no more nor five minutes noo!' Jim Tyas urged, apparently moved by such urgent compassion as had never moved him before. 'Give us a rope! We'll land the lot on ya i' less time nor it's ta'en us to talk of it.'

The captain shook his head; being an old man his voice could hardly be heard above the roar of that wild storm; and the rest of the crew made no reply. They were free to do as they would, and their freedom might have meant their death-warrant had fate so willed it.

A few more words passed between the men on the shuddering vessel and those who would save them even from their own self-sacrifice. Then all at once a cry was heard, the cry of men suddenly, wildly despairing. One of the five fisherman who had stayed on the Balderstone discovered all at once that their sole chance of escape was cut off. They were surrounded by the rising tide. A rush was made; the men on the deck of the schooner, exhausted as they were, fired another flare, as if to help the fishermen who were making that desperate rush through the tossing, hurling waves.

'Follow me!' Jim Tyas shouted, as he dashed foremost into the surf at the one point whence escape might be possible. And the men followed him. Again, in the middle of the narrow channel, they heard his voice. It sounded strange and faint and heavy, yet the word was encouraging. 'Follow me!'

And they did follow him, through the fierce, fatal, narrow sea, but not to his doom. Whether he had struck his head upon some point of rock, or whether some piece of floating wreck had struck him, none know, none ever might know.

When Jim Tyas washed up, as he did within half an hour of his leaving the Balderstone, he was bruised and hurt, and cold and dead.

They dared not tell Nan the truth—no one ever did tell her. She saw it in the look of the men who had escaped so hardly from the rocky peninsula, and who came up to the Forecliff with torn and bleeding hands, with white and ghastly faces, with dripping hair and clothing, and the smell of the salt seaweed about them everywhere.

Nan met them, looked upon them—there were four where five had been. All her questioning was in that one look. She turned away silently, quite quietly. Only Barbara Burdas turned with her.

'Come wi' me, Nan, come home wi' me. You'll be quieter there nor anywhere else. . . . An' there's noän i' the world 'll do better by ya. Say you'll come!'

Nan made no reply, but she permitted herself to be led away, Bab's arm round her, Bab's soothing word in her ear.

All that night Bab had no thought of herself, of her own strange grief. How should she? Dr. Douglas came and went; old Hagar Furniss came and stayed. Suzie Andoe refused to come, and Nan never asked for her. She asked for nothing, for no one. She made no moan,



It was some time about midnight when her baby was born—a fine, fair woman-child as any mother need wish to look upon.

But it was evident that poor Nan's heart sank still lower, hearing what was said.

'Don't say it's a girl, Barbie, *don't*. I'd liefer you'd say it were dead-born nor tell me it's a girl! . . . Poor folk should niver ha' nowt but lads. . . . They can fight their own waäy, lads can! They've less to suffer. . . . Nobody niver dreams o' what women has to go through, when they're poor; oh, God, no! . . . Does God Hisself know o' what woman bears—an' nobody to 'give em a thought; nobody to make nought no easier for 'em? . . . Does He know? . . . If He does, why doesn't He put it into the hearts o' rich folk to think, to help a bit? . . . They could do such a lot! Oh, do they iver think o' what they could do? . . . Why doesn't He make 'em think? . . . Why a easier bed, a softer pilla', a better blanket, a few better bits of under-things for one's sel' an' for the bairn, they'd all make a difference, a strange difference. . . . Not 'at I've aught to complain on neo, no; but that's your doin', Barbie. . . . Gie me a kiss! . . . You'll be as good to the little un as ya've been to me?'

'Nannie, be still!' Barbara sobbed, kissing the dying woman as she spoke. But Bab did not dream that death was near. She sat on the edge of her own little bed where Nan lay; all was quiet, and clean, and warm. The doctor had gone, saying that he would return presently; and Hagar Furniss shook her old head wisely when she heard this, saying nothing of her fear to Bab. It was poor Nan herself who first awoke the dread that was slumbering in Barbara's brain.

'Gie me a word,' Nan whispered after a brief silence. 'I'll sleep quieter under the sod if ya'll say one word. You'll be a mother to the little un!'

'*Me* be a mother to her!' Bab said, restraining herself. 'But where's the good o' talking to-night, when you're sa down? You'll be a mother to her yersel.'

'Then ya'll noän promise, Barbara?'

'Promise! What need o' promise, Nan? D'ya think 'at I'd ever see the bairn want so long as I'd bite or sup for mysel'?' Then she put out her hand, and took Nan's chill fingers in her own. 'Be at rest,' she said. 'If the little un ever wants any mother but you, I'll be proud to take your place. . . . Eh, me! Anybody 'ud be proud of a bairn like this. Why there's princesses 'ud give a thousand pound to hev one like it! . . . Be at rest about her, Nan.'

The poor girl smiled faintly, opened her eyes, in which there was a new, soft, strange light, and clasped Barbara's hand more strongly and warmly in her own.

'It is good o' ya, Barbara, it is good! But you were allus like that, allus so different fra me. . . . Ah've never been good mysel', though Dave's said so much, an' tried so hard. . . . But Ah wasn't like him—no, never. . . . Will Ah be 'forgiven, d'ya think?'



‘The Bible says so, if ya’re sorry.’

‘Ah’m sorry enough *noo*. . . . Ah’ve often been sorry when Ah couldn’t say so. . . . An’ Ah doänt know how to saäy noa prayers nor nothing. . . . Could you saäy one—a prayer, Barbie? Ah’d like ya to, if ya can. . . . But afore ya do, will ye saäy again ’at ya won’t-forsake the little lass? . . . If ever they take her fra ya, her father’s folk, ya won’t forget her?’

‘*Me forget!* . . . What’s the girl thinking on? . . . Hevn’t Ah said ’at ya were to set yer mind at rest?’

Barbara was still sitting on the edge of the bed; the chill hand of the dying mother was still clasped in her own strong and warm one. But even yet Barbara did not dream that the end was near. Strange to say she had never witnessed the oncoming of the last enemy save in that hour when her father and mother had struggled with him in the deep waters of Ulvstan Bight. Now all was different.

Bab thought awhile, praying silently with closed eyes, then a few tremulous and reverent words came audibly. Nan was comforted.

Presently she spoke again:

‘I’m still thinkin’ o’ the little lass,’ she said. ‘It’s a strange thought mebbe, but I *would* like ta call her after yon lady—her ya think so much on! . . . Would she take it badly, d’ya think?’

‘Take it badly! None her! . . . She’ll be ever sa proud to know ya wish it.’

‘Then will ya tell her?’

‘Ay, or you’ll tell her yourself.’

‘No; Ah’ll noän do that, not now. . . .’ Then there came a pause. Old Hagar was dozing by the crackling fire, the clock ticked loudly. Presently Nan spoke again:

‘Barbie! . . . Ah’ll noän live till the mornin’,’ she said slowly and feebly. ‘Ah’m dying *noo*. . . . Ah know Ah’m dying! Give me another kiss. . . . An’ be good to the little lass. . . . An’, Barbie, say that prayer again. . . . Ah’d like ya te be sayin’ that just when Ah go. Ah’d like ya te be speakin’ a word for me then! ’Twould go wi’ me like. . . . Ah’d not seem to be sa lone—not . . . not sa despart lone!’

## CHAPTER XXXII.

### CONJECTURE VAGUE.

‘Strew on her roses, roses,  
And never a spray of yew!  
In quiet she reposes;  
Ah, would that I did too!’

MATTHEW ARNOLD.

It is strange, recalling the story of the sea, to remember how often desperate effort has been made, lifeboats launched, rockets fired, men’s lives sacrificed, in the desire to aid some ship’s crew, while afterward that crew have been able calmly to leave their stranded



vessel, to walk ashore without danger or difficulty. It is strange, and it is sad; yet no human forethought may avert such sad-seeming incidents.

It happened thus, precisely thus, to the crew of the *Lady Godiva*. They clung to their vessel, and about three o'clock on the following morning they descended from the side to the beach as if no very extraordinary escape had been theirs. It even seemed to some matter for congratulation that only one life was lost in connection with the wreck of the schooner, and that the life of a man not too highly respected or too greatly beloved.

Yet the death of Jim Tyas made sensation enough on the Fore-cliff, and far beyond; and that the poor girl-wife should have laid down her life with his did not make the sensation less. The child, left so solemnly to Bab Burdas, would have been a cause of curiosity had Bab permitted; but she did not, and, as old Mrs. Andoe said, in an aggrieved tone—'Nobody daures say "wrong does she do"!'

As a matter of course, Bab had admitted old Suzie to see her little grandchild, and the child's dead mother. Suzie had wept, knelt, prayed, wept again, and thanked Bab almost abjectly for her goodness.

Barbara stood strong, and silent, and pale, dreading the next event; but there was not much need for dread.

'You must say once for all what you mean to do, Susan,' Bab began, speaking even more gravely and weightily than was her wont. 'I've told you what she said, her that's lying there on my own pillow. I've repeated what she said almost with her last breath, an' I've told you my own wish an' all. But for all that, you're the bairn's grandmother, an' the mother o' her 'at's lyin' there. So speak, but let it be once for all. D'ya want to take the child, to bring it up as you've brought up most o' yer own—i' rags, i' misery, i' dirt, i' hunger, i' ignorance, i' wickedness? I'm noän sparin' you, as mebbe I ought to ha' done, seein' as yer hair's gray, an' yer head tremblin'. But I've no patience with you—I never had. . . . Still, if yer bent on takin' the bairn fra me, take it! I'll none forget it, for *her* sake. But if you've ony regard for *her* last word, you'll leave it here, where it lies.'

Another gush of ready tears was the first answer, and Bab, not being trained to refinement of humanity, turned away impatiently. Then all at once her conscience troubled her. She would have spoken again, and more kindly, but Susan prevented her.

'Deä as ya will, Bab; deä as ya will! What could Ah mak' of a little wrecklin' like yon at this tahme o' daäy? . . . Naäy, Ah can noän be bothered wi' it. . . . Ah'd get noä sleep of a night, nowther me nor Pete. We're ower oäd te take a new-born bairn! Deä as ya will, Bab. Ah'll niver goä agaäin ya!'

'You promise? . . . You won't take the child away fra me when I've got her beyond bein' a burden?'

'Noä. Ah'd noän do that, Bab. . . . You're hard, so they all



say ; you're hard when ya *do* tak' agaän onybody. . . . But you're good to children, they alloo that. It's such as Dave you're hard wiv, an' such as yon son o' the Squire's. . . . Eh, hoo'ivver can ya rest i' the hoose, an know, . . . naäy, what is Ah sayin' ? Ya know nowt—nobody does—that's the worst on't. It 'ud noän seem sa bad if onybody knew.'

All at once Bab's attention had been arrested. She had turned so as to face old Susan, watching her closely, almost fiercely.

'Nobody *does* know, ya say ? That's a lie—a downright lie ! Ya know yerself !'

It was in vain the old woman denied, protested, shuffled, wept, denied again. The more she protested, the less Bab believed her.

'Now look here, Suzie,' Bab said at last. 'If ya don't tell me all ya know about young Theyn, I go straight this very hour to Dr. Douglas an' tell him what *I* know, what I know about the watch that Miss Douglas lost on the sands two years ago. . . . Oh, don't look sa startled ; ya know all about that !'

Poor old Suzie ! She could hardly be said to turn pale, but the smoke-brown tint of her face yielded to a mingled green and yellow ; her lips dropped apart, her eyes stared angrily.

'A watch ! . . . What are ya talkin' on, Bab ? Are ya daft to-night ? What are ya meanin' ?'

'Ah'm noän one to waste words !' Bab replied curtly. 'You know what I mean ! . . . You know what I'm going to do—that is, unless ya tell me what they've done to—to him ya spoke of—Squire Theyn's son ! . . . Tell the truth, an' *all* the truth, or I start for Yarrow within five minutes.'

It was of no avail that the old woman denied all knowledge of the matter Barbara spoke of. She had to disclose all she knew ; indeed, all she conjectured at last. It was not much ; but Bab was satisfied that no more was to be extracted.

'Ah can only guess,' the poor old fishwife said. 'I heerd a word, only a word ; 'twas poor Jim spoke it. An' then somebody said as how Dandy Will's little boat were missing', an' Ah couldn't but put two an' two together. . . . An' noo, if ya tell o' ma, they'll murther ma, as sure as Ah'm stannin' here ! But ya won't, Bab ; Ah know ya won't. . . . Ya were never one o' the leaky sort !'

Bab's heart was palpitating ; her eyes seemed blinded with a mist, not of tears, but certainly of emotion. Though Susan had done no more than confirm poor Nan's word, the confirmation was more than Bab could easily bear then.

The storm was still raging, the wind was howling round the little cottage, wailing in the chimney, beating at the door, shuddering at the window. Even there, in the middle of the Forecliff, the sound of the sea thundering at the foot of the cliffs, breaking upon the shore, booming, as it were, in the very ears of those who listened, and of those who would fain cease from listening—even there the violence of the storm seemed sufficiently appalling. What must it be out at sea ? What *could* it be to any man exposed to the worst ?



—on the deck of a ship for instance, or lashed in the rigging, as those had been lashed in the Bight below. That any man should be out in such a storm in a small boat and live was an idea to be mocked at, if any had heart for such mockery.

Bab had stood by her own fireside, silent for a while ; but at last she spoke :

‘Ya can go noo, Suzie,’ she said at last, speaking gently enough now. ‘The funeral ’ll be the day after to-morrow. The rector’s been here, an’ he says Miss Theyn’s goin’ to tak’ all the expense hersel’. Ah’ll let *her* do it ; I wouldn’t ha’ let nobody else. . . . It may be a bit o’ satisfaction to her. She’ll ha’ trouble anuff now. . . . She cared for *him*—him ’at they’ve done to death oot o’ spite. . . . An’ now go, Susan. . . . An’ if ya can fetch any news—news o’ him—I’ll pay ya as ya niver was paid for no piece o’ work since you were born. . . . Remember that.’

Susan Andoe had hardly left the door of the cottage on the Fore-cliff, when Bab, a little to her surprise, saw two other figures approaching—an elderly, worn, sorrowful-looking man, and a young girl wrapped in a gray cloak, with the hood drawn over her head in the place of hat or bonnet, a wise enough arrangement on such a day.

Intuitively Bab recognised Squire Theyn and his younger daughter ; and when the old man knocked at the door Bab was at least as white, as much overcome by emotion, as Rhoda herself was. She listened to the Squire’s questions—questions put briefly, calmly, and with dignity, and she answered with a dignity at least equal to that she heard.

‘I know but little, but very little, sir,’ she replied. The wind was shaking the door so violently that she could hardly hold it, hardly hear herself speak. ‘What I do know I’ll tell ya if ya come into the house.’

‘That I will *not* do,’ the Squire replied. ‘How can you ask it ? . . . Tell me what you know about my son.’

Bab grew so pale that even Rhoda grew pitiful.

‘If you know anything, *do* tell us,’ Rhoda urged in her hoarse low-pitched voice. There was trouble in it, as Bab heard.

In very few words Barbara told the Squire what she had gathered, what she feared. This she did without betraying either the dead or the living.

Squire Theyn listened, looked into the face of the girl who was speaking with a dazed, wondering look, as if he hardly understood. Then he turned away, stunned, silent. For above an hour he went on silently over the cliff-top ways ; and Rhoda, walking beside him, had no heart to break that sad silence.

Then, apparently awakening to her presence all at once, he turned quickly, but not savagely, as the child half expected.

‘Go home, Rhoda,’ he said, speaking gently enough ; ‘go home at once. . . . You can’t walk all the way back to Garlaff. Take Skipson’s cab. . . . Here’s the money to pay for it.’



'Come with me,' the girl ventured to say, unwonted tears in her eyes. 'Don't stay here, father, don't. . . . What can you do?'

The Squire was not angry, nay, he was touched more than he knew ; but no thought of yielding came to him.

'Do as I said, Rhoda ; go home. I'll come by-and by.'

The Squire turned away, but slowly and sadly rather than impatiently ; and Rhoda, going back by the Bight, came suddenly upon Canon Godfrey and Mrs. Kerne in earnest conversation with David Andoe. But David knew very little more than they did, though perhaps he feared more. He was about to express his worst fear, when Mrs. Kerne discerned Rhoda coming down the pathway that led from the cliff. She saw that the girl was alone and in tears. Mrs. Kerne's own face was not free from the sign of weeping.

'Hush !' she said imperatively ; 'say no more now.'

Then she turned to her niece with a kindness, a sympathy that caused poor Rhoda to break down altogether. If her Aunt Katherine could be so gentle, so affectionate as this, things must be looking very dark indeed. Rhoda's distress increased her aunt's attempt to relieve it ; and presently they all went together to Laburnum Villa, the beautiful new house that Mr. Kerne had built out beyond the promenade. Tea was ordered, gas lighted everywhere, fires stirred to a blaze ; but Mrs. Kerne's tears were more than all her hospitalities in her niece's sight. People who have wept together are friendlier friends than before.

When Rhoda went home, her uncle went with her in the cab, and did his best to comfort her.

'Don't give up hoping,' the Canon said understandingly ; 'don't do that. Will it help you to know that I, for my part, feel something that is almost certainty that I have not looked my last upon the face of your brother Hartas ? . . . I won't say too much ; but I will repeat what I have said in other words. I have not yet for one moment felt hopeless.'

## CHAPTER XXXIII.

### WATCHING BY THE SEA.

'Just Heaven instructs us with an awful voice,  
That Conscience rules us e'en against our choice,  
Our inward monitress to guide or warn,  
If listened to,—but, if repelled with scorn,  
At length as dire Remorse, she reappears,  
Works in our guilty hopes and selfish fears.  
Still bids Remember ! and still cries, Too late !  
And while she scares us, goads us to our fate.'

COLERIDGE.

ALL alone the old Squire walked there on the wind-swept cliff-top—the thundering of the ocean at the foot of the cliffs in his ear, the far white wide sea filling all his sight. Night was closing in again ; the storm had not abated. Men's fears were not yet at rest.



Some there were who had especial cause for fear. Dick Reah, not able to bear the sight of the little inn after the inquiry, during which he had been called upon to give evidence as to the death of Jim Tyas, had escaped from the place altogether, taking up his quarters at Danesborough. Sampey Verrill took a different view of the matter, and was not by any entreaty of wife or child to be drawn from walking to and fro by the edge of the still stormy sea. At high water, when he might walk there no longer, he took his stand on a rugged point of blue-black rock to the south of the Bight, and remained there till the tide had turned. He might not escape from that drear watch-point if he would, till the receding sea gave him permission.

They did not know of each other, these two lonely watchers. All night the Squire walked up and down to the north of the Bight; all night Samson Verrill sat or stood on the point of rock to the south, within a few feet of the sea that was still tossing wildly, madly, eagerly, as if no cry of lamentation were going up from the little bay for the deaths it had already caused.

At daybreak three of the drowned Burrells were found lying on the shore—the father was there, his eldest son, and the youngest. They were taken home, and a day or two later they were laid to rest in the old churchyard. You may see the tombstone now, with the date and manner of their death told in brief words. It is all the biography of men who lived brave lives, and died sad deaths, and it is told in some five or six lines cut with a graver's tool.

This is the conclusion :

‘Through many various tempests have we past,  
But a safe harbour we have found at last.’

It was David Andoe who found the youngest Burrell lying among the weed-covered stones to the north of the bay. David was sauntering over the beach, hoping to meet Samson Verrill, to get the truth from him as to what had become of Squire Theyn's son. David could not yet quite believe the tale that was spreading everywhere now; yet he feared that Sampey knew whether it were true or no. How else could his strange conduct be accounted for? Why should he be wandering about among the rocks by night and by day, only going home for a few moments at a time to snatch a little food between the tides? Surely Samson knew something, and David was fain to learn what he knew.

But when at last opportunity came, he could extract no details. Samson would acknowledge nothing, deny nothing.

‘For the sake o’ yon old man, *his* father, as is wandering about yon cliffs—for his sake tell me the truth, Sampey.’

So David urged; but the truth did not come.

‘If the Squire’s watchin’, let him watch. I’d noän hinder him!’

That was all that Samson Verrill would say. But he turned back to his own watching, and David could hardly fail to fear the worst.



Another night passed, the storm continued, and at daybreak the ocean seemed *churned*, so to speak, so far did the white surf extend, so entirely one mass of surging foam did it appear to be.

That a small boat should be anywhere on such a sea and not be broken to matchwood seemed an impossibility. The one possible thing was an event not to be thought of without pain, even by those least concerned.

Hope dies hardly—*how* hardly let those say who have spent not only days but long nights in the endurance of the agony of desperate hoping.

No entreaty prevailed with Squire Theyn. All the first night he had walked there, wind-driven, rain-swept, on the cliff-top. His eyes had looked upon the sea at even, while the last ray of light was dying from the farthest white wave, and his sight swept the same sea when the first ray of morning broke above the eastern horizon, spreading so slowly, so very slowly to the margin of the sea at his feet. And in all that wide stretch of water there was no sail, nor any boat; there was nothing for the poor old man's wearied gaze to rest upon save the stormy sea itself.

Very weary he was, for the soul within him was already fainting.

'Hartas!' he said, speaking softly, as if he were heard. 'Hartas! forgive me! . . . Forgive me, and come back. . . . I've not been a good father to you, but things shall be different. . . . Only come back!'

When the day was full in the sky he went home and took some food when Rhoda urged him, and rested awhile. But before night-fall he went back to the cliff-top pathway; and when Canon Godfrey, wearied with his day's work, his many visits to the cottages of the bereaved, his ministrations in the churchyard—when the Canon joined the old man, and would have walked with him, he found no response.

'Leave me—leave me alone!' the Squire prayed. 'It is all I ask of any human being now, that I may be left alone!'

On the fourth day the storm went down, but the comparative calm brought no hope to any who believed that Hartas Theyn had been dealt with as the people on the Forecliff were declaring. But little else was talked of in the place now. Dick Reah had never returned from Danesborough. Samson Verrill still went to and fro on the rocks, already a mere shadow of himself; and the sight of the Squire's gray, gaunt figure, going up and down the hillside road in the twilight and at dawn, drew tears from eyes not much accustomed to weeping.

Each day the carriage came down from the Rectory with Mrs. Godfrey in it, and sometimes Mrs. Meredith and her son Percival. Thorhilda did not come.

And none saw Barbara Burdas outside the cottage door during these terrible days. It was understood that she must have enough to do. One day there had been a double funeral, attended by half the people of the Bight. James Grainger Tyas, fisherman, and



Ann Eliza, his wife, had been laid side by side in the old churchyard at Yarburgh, on the same day, in the same hour. Bab Burdas was there by the two graves, the three-days old baby safely sheltered in her arms.

'I'll tell ya on it some day, my bairn,' she whispered through her blinding tears to the little one. 'An' maybe you'll be glad to know I brought you here. . . . that is, if you may ever be glad at all, bein' fatherless an' motherless! . . . But, eh, God helpin' me, you shall never miss them! . . . I'll be father an' mother to you, both i' one!'

That day passed, and then the next. Yet no tidings came of Hartas Theyn.

Rhoda wept at home, growing paler and thinner; yet she did her father's bidding, and kept one room ready for anything that might happen, doing all more willingly and gladly than ever before. Even her short-sighted and self-absorbed Aunt Averill marvelled at the change, and had not the human grace to keep her marvelling to herself.

And Bab Burdas wept in the rude house on the Forecliff; but not when anyone was by to see. Bab's weeping was done when her grandfather and the children were in bed, and Nan's baby lay quietly smiling and sleeping on her lap. . . . It was only then that Bab gave way.

So another day went on—it was the sixth.

And yet another came and went.

Each night Squire Theyn had kept his vigil on the cliff to the north of the Bight of Ulvstan; and the people saw and wondered. Was the old man going to watch there for ever? What was he hoping now? What could he be thinking?

They could not hear what he still kept saying:

'Hartas! Hartas! forgive me! Come back, and forgive me! I wasn't a good father, but I cared for you. I always cared. . . . Even when you were a little lad, I cared. . . . Come back again!'

At last came the eighth evening—the eighth from that on which three angry and resentful men had sought to express their resentment in a manner not altogether unknown in the annals of Ulvstan Bight. And now one was lying in the churchyard at Yarburgh; one was drowning his remorse in drink at Danesborough; and one was trying in his own dumb and blind way to atone by wandering among the rocks by the edge of that sea that might give up the dead, but could surely never give up the living man to whom that cruel deed had been done.

'Yon Sampey Verrill's losin' his senses, he mun be!'

It was old Hagar Furniss who spoke. She had gone in to help Bab awhile, as she did almost every evening now when her own day's work was done, knowing that nothing she could do for Bab would be unrequited.

The old woman saw at once that some change had come over Barbara. The girl's face was flushed to a burning crimson; her



eyes bright and restless ; her lips seemed to tremble when she spoke.

‘Eh, but I’ve looked long for you, Hagar!’ she said eagerly. ‘I’m wanting you sorely ! Can you stay the night, all night here with the bairn ? Say you can !’

‘Ah can stay if Ah’m wanted, honey !’ the old woman replied kindly. ‘What’s wrong ? Naught wi’ the bairn, I hope ?’

‘No, it’s none her, thank God ! But I’m goin’ out o’ doors. I *must* go. . . . Don’t ask ma no question, Hagar ! Give the little one all she needs, an’ take the best o’ care on her. . . . I must go at once !’

Then, kissing the new-born infant, taking an anxious look at the sleeping children in the next room, at little Ailsie in the room above, Bab went out.

It was dark by this time ; but not entirely dark. There was no moon ; but that wondrous clear, deep starlight so often seen on autumn evenings in the north seemed to glow upon the earth as if some light came from below to meet that from above.

Bab took her way to the north without a thought ; going down into the Bight, up the opposite cliff-side, and away out across the cliff-fields. The Squire was there ; she passed him silently, tremulously, about a mile and a half beyond the Bight. He too was going northward, but slowly, wearily, hopelessly. A sigh reached Bab’s ears as she flew onward—a long sad sigh that was half a groan, and drew the tears from her eyes once more ; a very passion of tears—blinding, scalding, not relieving. She felt shattered when the moment was over.

And yet she was not hopeless, not as others were. Had she had no thought that Hartas Theyn was yet alive she had not been there.

Bab was too sensitive to ridicule to have been able to tell anyone about her of the real reason for her present action.

‘I could ha’ told *her*’ (‘*her*’ meaning always Miss Theyn)—‘I could ha’ told *her*’ at I was moved by a dream. *She* wouldn’t ha’ laughed at me. *She* wouldn’t ha’ looked at me as if she thought I was a fool.’

‘A dream—only a dream ; but one so vivid that all day Bab had lived and moved in the atmosphere of it.

For days past all her thought, all her imagining, had been of the sea, and of what might be happening somewhere out upon it if the things that people were whispering were true ; and almost as a matter of course her dream had been a sea-dream.

She seemed to see it quite plainly, even after she awoke—the wide stormy ocean she knew so well ; and far away in the horizon a boat, a mere dark speck upon a shining floor. And she had known—at once she had known—that in the boat was a solitary man, the man she loved. Then all at once, as things do happen in dreams, she had found herself in the same tiny craft, and there, at her feet, this man dying or fainting. She took the dark, drooping head in her arms, the hair wet with the salt sea-spray, and in her dream she



caressed it, in her dream she kissed the pallid lips ; kissed them again and again ; kissed them so passionately that once more life, dear life, breathed through them.

And with this breath of another's life on her lip she awoke.

This was why Bab was out upon the cliff-top that calm star-lit night ; this was why she remained there, waiting to see what might come to pass.

She no more came so near to the Squire, though she knew of his presence there. Always she remained a little farther to the north, receding when he advanced. Her instinct toward self-effacement in all things had developed rapidly of late. It was a certain sign of other developments. Only the coarser soul desires to be aggressively *en évidence*.

Long after midnight Bab watched there. She thought often of the old man behind ; of what his sorrow must be, his longing, his weariness, his despair. Her heart yearned toward him ; for another's sake, perhaps, still the yearning was tender and true. If only she might have spoken to him ; if only she might have dared to comfort him with the hope that still lingered in her own heart !

So the night went on—that long, drear, silent night.

At last the dawn broke ; a soft, pink-gray dawn above a soft, pink-gray sea.

Slowly the faint pink deepened to rose colour ; slowly the rose-tint spread across the wide, far distance.

Then, presently, above the pure rose-red, a glowing gold gleamed through the shining edge of each ascending cloud ; pearl-gray shadows subdued the amber and the rose into one lovely harmony of colour ; the sea took up each note and repeated it ; while overhead, even now, the stars were fading one by one from the night-toned ether of deepest blue. Bab had seen many sunrises, but none had moved her as she was moved now.

She was standing on the farthest point of the big brown point called Scarcliff Nab, tremulous, hopeful, admiring, despairing, expectant ; above all, expectant. Every moment the scene about her seemed to reproduce more closely the scene of the vision she had had.

Expectant ! Yes, her very soul seemed to tremble within her as her quick sight swept the sea-leagues of the wide horizon before her. Her heart was beating wildly. This was the scene ! this the light ; this the hour ! this the moment !

'He is there ! he must be there ! And yet no, not there, but *here*—somewhere near to me. . . I feel it ! I know it ! . . . He is living ! He is near !'

Bab did not say these things ; even to herself she did not say them.

For a long time, or long it seemed, she stood there on the brown, rugged ness. The light morning breeze sighed as it passed her by ; she had no sigh to give in response. Her whole being was strained to the utmost tension she might bear.



At last! *at last!* AT LAST! Bab knelt on the dark bare rock, and covered her face with her hands; and as she knelt she prayed; prayed passionate prayers for whomsoever might be living, or dying, in the far-off speck that she knew to be a boat.

But for her dream, that warning dream, she had not been there.

Beyond doubt this was the very boat of her dream, the very aspect it had had in that vision of the night, a mere dark speck out upon a wide and shining sea.

'He is there! living or dead, he is *there!*' Barbara said, rising to her feet, and hastening over the cliffs to find the old man, who was yet doubtless watching. '*Living or dead, Hartas Theyn is in yon little boat!*'

## CHAPTER XXXIV.

### AN UNUSUAL EXPERIENCE.

It may be, somewhat thus we shall have leave  
To walk with memory,—when distant lies  
Poor earth, where we were wont to live and grieve.'

WM. ALLINGHAM.

To sit by a warm fireside on a stormy night of autumn or of winter, the glow of the crackling coal brightening the forefront of the scene; the lamplight enlivening the mid-distance; curtains carefully drawn over door and window—to sit thus and listen to the incessant roar of the sea at the foot of the cliffs—but just outside, is a state of things apt to have very different effects upon different natures. One man will feel how good and pleasant it is to be safe and comfortable indoors; another will not perceive his thought or emotion to be changed in any way; while a third will be saddened: consciously or unconsciously his mind will wander to those who must go down to the sea in ships and do business in great waters. To be aware that only a stone's throw away some brave ship may be sinking to her doom, with souls on board, despairing, helpless, hopeless—to be reminded of this by the ceaseless surging of the sea is to have but little peace of mind while the gale may last. One may readily be brought to wonder why, since the eye may be closed from seeing, the tongue made to cease from speaking, the ear alone should be undefended by any power over its own function? To be able to close one's ears as easily as the eyes are closed would seem a boon not easily to be overrated—certainly not while compelled to listen to a wild storm at sea.

Night by night, while the hurricane lasted, Damian Aldenmede walked on the beach, now talking with this fisherman, now with that, and seldom returning to his lodgings on the Forecliff before midnight, and bearing within himself then a sense of apprehension, of dread, not to be done away by any reasoning, any argument.

He had never seen much of Hartas Theyn, and the little he had seen had not been calculated to awaken any esteem; yet, strangely



enough, he was aware of a certain drawing, a certain attraction. He had discerned that the face that could look so sullen, so heavy, could yet flush with generous feeling; that the eyes from which such fierce anger could flash were yet eyes that could soften to love and love's most pathetic expression.

'He seems on the way to ruin,' the artist had said to himself; 'but I fancy he is one of the few so tending that one would care to save from going any farther. He may be saved—I feel sure that he may; his strong and pure love for Barbara Burdas may be the means of saving him. . . . Perhaps I have not seen the matter all round.'

These thoughts had come to him only an hour or two before he had heard that Hartas was missing, and inevitably the distressing news had deepened his compassion to the uttermost, and some self-blame was mingled with his thought as he paced the narrow floor of his lodging in a very throe of pity and pain.

Night by night, during this sad, strange week, Damian Aldenmede was thus constrained by his suffering for another, and night by night the man for whom he suffered was tossing out at sea, drifting there alone, yet not altogether despairing, not in any sense desperate.

It had been no easy matter to undo the ropes wherewith he had been bound; yet he had found it possible, after long effort, to free himself, and with the unfastening of the last knot one phase of his physical suffering had ended.

The sense of being so bound that he could not lift his arms, or raise his hand to his head, had gradually and quite unexpectedly become a very terrible thing, so terrible that for some two hours this alone seemed as if it might be a sufficient cause of death.

Why, because he was not able to move his limbs, he should have felt that he could not breathe, is probably as much a question for the psychologist as the physiologist. The intolerable sense as of strangulation might possibly have been avoided by anyone who had understood the matter sufficiently well to enable him to remain calm, refraining from all effort, or only making effort of the quietest. But this Hartas did not understand. How should he? So long as his position had had the interest of novelty, so long as others had been near at hand to witness his coolness, his bravery—which yet was not assumed—till then there had been motive enough to sustain his mood. And it was not till some four or five hours had passed by that nature recoiled upon him, and the recoil was strong. The truth of those succeeding hours could never be told in words, written or spoken.

Silvio Pellico has related, for the interest of all time, how terrible are the first hours and days of life within prison walls. The sense of confinement, of the nearness of everything, of the inability to move beyond a certain limit, must in itself be sufficiently dreadful; yet in most recorded cases it would seem as if another dread had been added, vague, pitiful, terrifying, unspeak-



able. Hartas Theyn had known but little of such records, so that whatever his sensations might be they were not charged with the experience of others. And in one sense his present state bore no resemblance to the state of a man imprisoned. No walls enclosed him ; the rising wind swept across his heated forehead refreshingly ; there was the consciousness of limitless space about him everywhere. Yet so long as he was bound his suffering was intense, and the effort to free himself from the ropes, the painful, powerful, long-continued effort, was producing something that might without exaggeration be called agony. . . . But at last he was free, and for a time he knew nothing but grateful sensation.

And all the while the hurricane was increasing, the little boat was tossing to and fro like a nutshell upon that wide waste of waters. And now the darkness was of itself a terrible thing. No light was visible anywhere, either on the land or on the sea ; the stars were overspread by the dense storm-cloud. Nothing remained save the heaving sea—heaving, splashing, rolling in that dread darkness. A stouter heart than that of Hartas Theyn might have quailed.

Inevitably in such an hour the man was brought face to face with himself, with his own soul.

When no future remains, the present is quickly effaced ; it is the past that becomes all we have to offer.

To offer ! When we think of it so—the offering of that past life of ours with all its shortcomings, all its sins, all its selfishnesses, its little care for others, the few hours spent in prayer, the many hours given to the world and worldly matters ; when we would think of this brief earthly life thus, as of something that the soul must take with it—must bring as an offering to lay down at the feet of Him who sits upon the Great White Throne, then we do not dare to think—thought is silenced.

The life is there ; it has been lived. Not one hour of it may be effaced, not one hour lived over again.

To Hartas Theyn that time of silence was long, and dark, and fearful ; he dreaded the awakening of thought that he knew must come if life remained to him but a little while longer.

It is said that drowning men see all the past as in a lightning flash ; and this is entirely conceivable. We most of us have such moments, even when we are far from any chance of drowning. Sometimes they come, as in a dream, between sleeping and waking—sometimes in hours of deep grief, of anxiety, of suspense. Now and then a flash of disclosing light crosses a moment of intense joy. . . . Usually this disclosure, or the effect of it, remains with us—usually for our good.

The time of enlightenment that came to Hartas Theyn could certainly not be spoken of as momentary ; it lasted for some hours—hours of vivid, vigorous presentment of all the chief incidents and features of his past life ; and each one was heightened as by the light of some spiritual electricity, so that every detail was seen



and in an altogether new aspect. There was nothing now to hide his nakedness from his own soul's sight. He saw that he was naked, and he saw it to his bitter and painful shame.

Strangely enough, the very words of St. Paul came to him as he sat there, chilled, suffering much in body, and yet more in mind. Doubtless they were as an echo from some sermon heard long ago :

'For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven :

If so be that being clothed we shall not be found naked.'

It was somewhat of a surprise to himself that a text of Scripture should cross his mind, especially since it appeared to come with some accuracy ; that he should be drawn to dwell upon it, to try to find the meaning of it, was more surprising still.

He had yet to learn how true it is that even the smallest amount of spiritual awakening, of spiritual light and strength, means an immense widening of whatever powers the intellect may possess.

Carlyle's definition of genius is this :

'The clearer presence of God Most High in the soul of man.'

And it is certain that no truer or finer definition of that mysterious quality, or faculty, has been given to the world as yet. No sooner does a man begin to be aware of some higher influence working within his soul than he becomes also aware that that higher influence, acting *through the soul*, is developing his thinking and reasoning and perceiving powers to the uttermost. The event, unprecedented in his soul's history, is equally unprecedented in his mental history—a fact he is apt to perceive with as much regret as astonishment. He now knows what he 'might have been !'

But how dimly he knows ! His utmost imagination may not disclose to him all that true living had disclosed.

That night at sea—that first dread night of many that were to be yet more dread, was a crisis in the life of Hartas Theyn.

How could he have been so senseless, so unseeing ? . . . By-and-by he became aware that this comparative sight was but as comparative blindness.

And over and over came the thought, What I might have been ! If I had tried simply to do what I knew to be right, to be wise ; if, as the Canon said the other day, I had but been true to the light I had, what might I not have been ?

And then thought itself seemed hushed. He could not realize the man he might have been had he been happy, good, respected, at peace with others, at ease with himself. The ideas were all too dim, too unusual. He was not equal to the double strain of listening to a wild storm that was blowing so closely about him, and at the same time creating a vision of that slain self whose wreck he was.



He knew the wreck.

‘If *I* had been different, all had been different,’ he said, speaking audibly, since there was none to hear. ‘*She* would have cared then ; she might even have looked up to me, instead of despising me, as I know she does. . . . as I know she *has* done ! . . . How will it be with her, with others, when I am only a memory ? . . . Will they care to remember at all ? *Can she forget ?*’

But as he lay there, the boat lurching heavily from side to side, shuddering under the blows of wind and wave, the power of consecutive thought began to desert him. Very gradually it departed from him ; but there came an hour when neither remorse, nor hope, nor fear dwelt with him persistently. It was only by moments at a time that he could lay bare his soul before that Unknown God whom hitherto he had only thought of with a blind, unreasoning, ignorant dread. It did not even seem strange to him that the dread had passed away, that he could speak as to One near—not speaking complainingly, not bitterly, not even as one bewailing his evil case ; but simply as one seeking forgiveness, first of all forgiveness ; and to this end he did not spare himself in confession. From the first memory of his life to the last there was relief, unutterable relief, in laying bare his soul before that soul’s Maker, in desiring pardon for sins remembered and unremembered—sins of boyhood and of later age, sins of omission and sins of commission, sins of body and sins of soul—never before had he known such relief as that which came to him as he tossed there on the midnight sea, recalling all his life, all his errors ; and then, in desiring forgiveness for the same, bending his knee as reverently as he might, but only able to do this for moments at a time. First, forgiveness he craved ; then compassion ; last of all, companionship.

‘Be near me !’ he cried, when once more the darkness came down and the storm was apparently at its worst. ‘Be near me ! I don’t deserve it ; I know, I feel I do not. But stay with me, good God—stay with me through this night !’

## CHAPTER XXXV.

STILL DRIFTING, DRIFTING ON. NO LAND, NO SAIL.

‘O, let me be awake, my God !  
Or let me sleep alway.’

AGAIN the darkness fell and stayed ; the storm still raged on ; and a long period of merciful unconsciousness came upon Hartas Theyn, whether of sleep or of the semblance of coma that comes of exhaustion and hunger, he did not know, nor might he know how long it had lasted, whether four hours or forty. He awoke at last, unrefreshed, and consumed by a burning thirst. That was his worst physical trouble, that terrible thirst.

Only once did a dread paroxysm of hunger seize him. Since then he has written the story of that fierce hour on paper—in



a little book not yet yellow with age or worn with time. There is no need to reproduce his words here. Suffering of that kind may be studied, by all who care for such study, in many accounts of shipwreck, and in most records of Arctic research. It is not always profitable.

Afterward it seemed to him that all that had been really terrible had lain within the lines of his mental or spiritual suffering, rather than in the physical.

From time to time there arose a cry in his heart, but now it was one cry, and now another.

'Would that I might live my life again!' That was the cry that came most frequently. 'Would that I might live but one week of that old life!

'To see my father's face, to sit there by the old fireside, were it but for an hour—but for one hour—oh, God, what would I not give?

'And to see *her*, to touch her hand! Is it possible that yesterday—was it yesterday? was it a week ago?—I might have done it? And I did not know. I did not know what it all meant, that heavy, stupid, misused life. No, I knew nothing yesterday.'

And ever between his wordless thought there came the sound of the wind as it rose passionately, and fell with its own disturbed sadness. And the waves leapt upon the little boat, and hurled and clashed together, now in the darkness, and now in the dawn, now in the drear setting of the sun. And he who was drifting there did not always know whether the dim light meant the coming on of night or the departing; for ever again and again came that prolonged merciful unconsciousness.

The thunderstorm that broke upon the Bight of Ulvstan about that hour when Jim Tyas came to his death had not seemed so terrible to Hartas Theyn, and by that he knew that he must have been far enough away at that time. The recollection of it was about the last definite recollection that he had.

After that, for some four or five days and nights, he must have lain more or less in that strange and ever-deepening stupor. It was not—so he thought—at any time pure, simple, refreshing sleep. Though he dreamt strange dreams, and had strange visions, yet it was not sleep.

Always while the storm lasted he was conscious of the deafening, exhausting rush and roar of the wind, the whirl, and flash, and roll of the vast unbroken waves. That the wind had remained so long unchanged, so that he was kept out there in the deep water, had been matter of gratitude too deep for words. Having no oars, he could have done nothing to help himself, and he knew that if he were once to come near to the broken surf that fringed the land nothing could save him.

Yet the knowledge did not now, even in his waking moments, distress him; feeling was too much benumbed for that. It would soon be over, that last dread strife, with that last dread enemy to



be destroyed ; while the death he was even now dying, hour by hour, might in the end be very painful.

The storm began to subside during the fourth night, and Hartas, rousing himself from a long lethargic slumber, saw the gleam of the rising sun upon the gradually calming sea. But he saw nothing else—no sail, no land.

Thrice a screw-steamer had passed by, one quite near, and he had managed to stand up in the boat to wave his blue silk scarf to and fro with some energy ; but the steamer passed on, and took no notice. It was a time of harrowing excitement and suspense, and what wonder that he felt sure that he had been seen ? The two other steamers were too far away for suspicion, though each time his effort was made to the uttermost of his power.

All the last days and nights, the dawns, the twilights, seemed mingled together in a strange confusion ; and since the calm that succeeded the storm was so great, there was now no external influence to arouse him. The temperature was not low for the time of year ; he had no sense of hunger ; there was nothing to be done but to lie in seeming slumber, drifting, on, and on, and on, not even knowing that since the wind had changed he must be drifting back within sight of land.

From all suffering he had ceased, from all hoping, from all despairing. That last dawn rose slowly, quietly, holily ; and it rose upon one who might see nothing of its beauty, know nothing of its dread solemnity. The little boat might have been his bier for all he knew.

## CHAPTER XXXVI.

### HOW RESCUE CAME.

‘Touch not—hold !

And if you weep still, weep where John was laid  
While Jesus loved him.’

E. B. BROWNING.

LONG afterward Barbara Burdas remembered that autumn morning, and remembered certain passages of it with a feeling that was almost shame. Had she really forgotten herself so far, her position, the strange complications of her life, as to put her trembling hand upon Squire Theyn’s arm, to urge him to come with her at once—at once !

‘*He is there !*’ she had cried, one hand pressing in excited entreaty the old man’s shoulder, the other pointing to that speck out upon the rose-red sea. ‘Do you understand ? It is your son ! He is there, out at sea—*dead or alive, he is there !* Won’t you come with me ? Won’t you come at once ?’

The Squire did not repulse her in any way, yet he did not respond, or seem to comprehend. The old man was wearied by the want of sleep, exhausted by sorrow, by remorse, by suspense. The words he heard were only half understood, and this Barbara per-



ceived. But she dared not, could not stay longer there. Besides, her instinct told her that Squire Theyn could not be of use in the present crisis.

'*He is there !*' she repeated as she flew on over the fields, brushing the dew from the grass, from the tall dead hemlocks, the crisp rest-harrow ; her eyes still straining to watch that small dark speck out upon the wide, still sea. '*He is there ?*' she kept on saying, saying it solely for her own consolation.

There was no one else to be consoled. The little townlet had not yet awakened, and the tide being barely half out, Samson Verrill had not yet returned from the lonely point of rock where he still kept watch. Barbara knew that he would be there, and she knew that all the little world about her would be yet asleep, and that time would be required for any effective awakening. And who could say what time might mean ? A quarter of an hour—nay, five minutes might mean much to a man who had been drifting about the North Sea without sustenance of any kind for over a week. There was no opportunity for deliberation. Barbara flew down to the beach, unmoored the lightest boat she could find there, and managed by almost superhuman effort to launch it all alone. As she drew rapidly away from the shore, she saw that the Squire was hastening down the cliff ; had he understood at last ? Would he do all that might be done in the way of preparation for her return—*her* return, and *his*—his of whom not only her thought but her very life seemed full ? The smoke was beginning to curl upward from a cottage chimney on the Forecliff ; the gulls from the rocks to the south were flying in and out by myriads, chuckling, screaming, subsiding, rising again ; and there, far away upon the dark point in the distance, Samson Verrill stood, lonely between sea and sky. Barbara could see him quite plainly, and he would see her, that she knew, and he would wonder what her errand might be ; not being able from his own comparatively low-lying position to see the speck that she had seen from the utmost height of the northern cliff-top. But Barbara did not think long of Samson Verrill. Thought was merged in action, in effort ; such effort as Barbara herself had never made before this hour. Not the strongest man could have made swifter progress ; yet, after nearly an hour's rowing, that dark speck still seemed leagues away upon the subsiding silvery gray of the sunlit sea.

It was not always that Barbara could see the small dark point which she knew to be a boat, yet she rowed on in the direction where she had first seen it ; and now and then for her helping she caught sight of it, and the sight lent always fresh energy to her utmost effort.

At last she came nearer, consciously, tremulously. She had not been mistaken, it *was* a boat, a small, brightly painted boat, blue and white and vivid green, the exact counterpart of that she knew to be missing ; but why should she say even that to her herself, being so assured it was the same ? She stood up in her own boat,



shading her eyes with her hand from the uprising sun. Then suddenly she felt her face flush with fear, with a strange unknown dread. After all, *could* it be that the boat was empty? Was it possible? She saw no sign.

More slowly, more sadly now, she bent herself again to the oars, then sadder and slower still, as one who draws near to the bed on which a friend is lying, breathing out the last breath of the life that had been to others so precious, so dear.

The girl dared not look. She paused a little, rowed on again, stopped, covering her face with her hands. She was quite near, yet no sign came, no sound. . . . At last, she raised her head.

A wild throbbing pulsation seized all her frame. He was there; Someone was there—a dark figure was lying helplessly at the bottom of the boat, toward the stern. And it was the figure of him she had seen in her dream.

She made no cry, asked no question: that would have been so useless. And then it was that she entered into that vivid vision once more, not conscious of what she did. Afterward the dream and the deeds of its realization were as one in her recollection.

She made no effort to arouse or to move the prostrate, stirless figure that lay, as the dead lie, at the bottom of the boat; but, seeing it, regret awoke like a lightning flash. Why had she brought no food, no water, no restoratives of any kind? Had excitement bereft her of sense?

She hardly dared to look upon the pallid face, above which the heavy black hair was lying in wild disarrangement. Removing the oars from the boat she was in, placing them in the rowlocks of the little boat that had been drifting to and fro during the terrible storm, she sat down for a moment or two overcome by exhaustion, by emotion. Yet she could not look upon the face of Hartas Theyn.

Presently she took the boat in which she had rowed out in tow, and started back for the land. For near two hours she pulled slowly to the shore, knowing but little more than Hartas Theyn himself knew.

By this time there was a crowd gathered upon the beach, an eager, anxious, fervid, almost unbelieving crowd. David Andoe was foremost in grasping the bow of the boat as it grated upon the bed of gravel. Damian Aldenmede was but just behind, and had the greater strength of the two. Between them they lifted the dead, or dying, man to the shore, and carried him to the nearest house. Early as it yet was, Canon Godfrey was there, and Mrs. Kerne. The news had spread fast and far. . . . As a matter of course, old Ephraim was in the very forefront of the scene; and to Barbara's satisfaction he was there when David Andoe returned, and was able to help her to reach the cottage on the Forecliff. She needed help, though she was hardly able to thank those who helped her.

'Let me be,' she said faintly, as she sank into a chair by the fire.  
t me be! . . . It's all I'd ask of you—let me be!'



## CHAPTER XXXVII.

## FORGIVENESS.

A MERRICLE! Noän sa much of a merricle!" said old Ephraim when they told him with many wondering words that Hartas Theyn yet lived. 'Whya Ah've knowed a man mysel', the captain o' the *Eagle* brigantine, sailing fra Shields for Dieppe' (*Deep*, he called it), 'laden wi' coals. An' the vessel were o'erta'en i' the gale o' '31; an' ivery man aboard except the Captain were washed off o' the deck wiv a single sweep of a single wave, an' he'd ha' gone an' all ef so it hadn't been 'at he'd been lashed to the mast. But lashed he were, an'—fortnit for him—lashed he remained. Noo mind it's no lie Ah'm tellin' o' ya. Ah knowed the man, Hebbin'ton, his name were, Captain Hebbin'ton, but whether James or John, Ah'll not saäy. But this Ah will saäy, for I heerd him tell the taäle wi' my oän ears, as how he were tossin' aboot i' the German Ocean for no less nor two-an'-twenty days—noo, *two-and-twenty*! Think o' that! An' never no bite nor sup passed his lips save once, an' that was after a heavy rain, when he wrung his shirt-sleeves, an' so got a few drops o' water! That were something like a marvel! . . . Eight days! an' the last fouer on 'em fairly mild weather! Well, it's hardly much to boast on, let aloäne callin' it a merricle!

Such was old Ephraim's opinion, but it need hardly be said that it was not generally held throughout the neighbourhood. The Squire's son had been removed, so soon as Dr. Douglas considered it safe, to Mrs. Kerne's house, where he lay, still exhausted, still silent, still pallid. Thorhilda and Mrs. Godfrey came and went; Rhoda came and stayed; and the Squire seldom left Laburnum Villa till nightfall. Yet, so far, little was known to anyone of Hartas's experience during that terrible time, or its effect upon himself. It was evident that he could not talk of these things as yet.

When at last his strength did begin to return to him it was but natural that his father should ask him of the beginning of the strange event; that he should desire to know how it had been brought about, and, above all, by whose immediate agency. The Squire had only suspicion where others felt certainty.

It was a fine October afternoon when the old man first spoke of the past. The sun was streaming through Mrs. Kerne's costly Indian curtains; shining into a large richly-furnished room, laden with ornament of perhaps not the most refined description. Hartas was lying upon a sofa near the fire, his father sat on a chair near the foot of it. Canon Godfrey was by his side. Mrs. Kerne was walking up and down the room, knitting as she went, openly confessing herself too nervous to sit still.

'You must forgive me, you must bear with me,' Hartas said, raising himself by feeble effort from the cushions.



And it was a strange face that was lifted to look upon the two men beside him, a face never again to be what it had been. Not only the expression, but every feature seemed changed. The dark eyes, though deeply sunk, yet looked larger, and had deeper intensity of colour, of meaning, of outlook. The once bronzed face was shrunken, and pale, and nervous-looking. A certain sad eagerness was written upon the countenance, a certain sad remembrance; it was the face of a man who had passed through his life's crisis, and was yet all unaware of its full meaning, of the influence it was intended to have upon the days to be.

'You must forgive me,' he said in answer to his father's desire for knowledge of the days but just past. 'I know the men; one is not living, so I am told. The others shall be to me as if they had died also. . . . It cannot be otherwise, it cannot. They did wrong. They were mistaken, they were cruel—bitterly cruel and hard. But it is not for me to punish them, not for anyone belonging to me. Don't say any more, don't ask me to say any more. . . . I can say nothing but that.'

For a moment Squire Theyn could hardly speak, so divided he was between emotions of varying nature. Disappointment was probably uppermost.

'They'll say it's cowardice, nothing but rank cowardice!' he exclaimed bitterly.

Hartas smiled; a wan, sad smile it was.

'No, they won't think that,' he said faintly.

After a little more uncomfortable and unprofitable discussion the Squire got up and went away. He would not quarrel with this newly-restored son of his, not willingly, yet it was an effort to subdue his anger, and Mrs. Kerne was feeling for him and with him as she seldom did.

When Canon Godfrey and Hartas were left alone, the former asked a question he had been wishing to ask for some time.

'Would you mind telling me *why* you wish to shield these men—these ruffians, I may almost say?'

'No; I can tell you,' Hartas replied, speaking with the new gentleness of manner that seemed so curiously natural to him already, as if some inner and better self had been set free from the outer. 'I can tell *you*, but surely you do not need that I should put it into words? You can see for yourself that for *her* sake alone—Barbara's—it would be better that the matter should drop at once and for ever. If I bring it to light, if I bring these men to justice, the cause of their deed must become even a commoner topic for conversation than it is now. And how could I bear that, knowing how ill she would bear it? . . . No; help me once more, be the friend you have always been, even when I couldn't see that you were my friend at all. And try to persuade my father to see the matter from my point of view. . . . He will thank you afterward; so shall I.'

The Canon thought for a moment; then he lifted his kindly blue eyes to the face of the still suffering man before him.



'I will do what you wish,' he said, with an eager concession in his manner. 'And I believe after all that you are right ; I believe you are. It would do little good to bring these men to what is called justice—it might do harm. I do think you are right, that the affair, painful as it is, had better be allowed to die out of itself.'

'Better far ; and I thank you. . . . But now, how shall I put the question ? Have you nothing to tell me of *her*—of Barbara ?'

'Not much—that is, not much that will gladden you in any way to hear. I can only say that the more I see of her, the more I discern the true greatness, the true beauty of her character. She seems to be absolutely without any trace of selfishness, of self-seeking.'

'Have you seen her lately ?'

'I saw her yesterday ; the baby was baptized. Barbara, your sister, and myself were the sponsors. . . . Poor little mite that it is ! What will be its future, I wonder ?'

'But Barbara ? . . . Has she got over it all—that terrible time ? Did she look like herself ?'

'To tell the truth she did not, not quite. She looks older, paler, thinner, as if she had gone through an illness. But what wonder ? And she is young enough to recover ; and I expect she will do so, by-and-by.'

'What makes you say that ?' Hartas asked, with the difficulty in his voice that comes of emotion.

'Hope makes me say it,' the Canon replied. Presently he added, 'You have not forgotten that day on the scaur ? You remember what I said ?'

'Yes, I remember,' Hartas replied, with faint white lips, and un-hopeful tones ; 'perhaps it would be better if I did not.'

'What makes you say that ? Of what are you thinking ?'

'I am thinking of her, that it cannot be, that it can never be, that dream of mine. How shall I tell you all—all I have discovered ? Sorrow enlightens one. . . . I believe, as you kindly told me you believed, that Barbara cares for me ; perhaps she may even care more than I know ; but there are things she cares for more. . . . I fancy she sees a certain honourableness in refusing to consent to a marriage that seems in her sight one of—what shall I say ?—mere difference of position seems so poor a ground, and I feel sure that it does not cover all her thought. To say the truth, I fear that to Barbara my sister Thorhilda represents all goodness, all refinement, all culture, all that she herself thinks highest and worthiest ; and therefore it is that her admiration is a sort of worship, a worship that counts self-sacrifice as the purest pleasure. I have expressed my thought badly, inadequately, but you will know what I mean. And this—this event—before I see Barbara I seem to know that it will make her less willing to yield than ever. And I will not urge her ; I will never again, if I can help it, put any pressure upon her. I seem to know now that it can never be, that dream of mine ! . . . Yet how I care for her ! *How I care !* . . . But for-



give me! I never meant to say all this. Forgive me, and don't betray me!

Hardly thinking of what he was doing under the pressure of emotion, the Canon rose to his feet and held out his hand as a sign of leave-taking.

'I will not betray you,' he said gently, and with effort; 'but let me mention one thing that I had been thinking of: it seems to me that as a matter of common gratitude Barbara Burdas should be asked to come and see you. . . . She saved your life, remember.'

'She will not come,' Hartas replied instantly, his fear overcoming his desire.

'Do you think not? . . . I imagine that she will, if I make a point of it.'

'Ah, if you put it so!' Hartas said, turning his face away in disappointed sadness. 'She will not refuse you, but her coming under those conditions will be no help to me. . . . I know her better now than I used to do. I almost understand her; but she is above me, and consequently she sees beyond me. . . . She may come, I may see her, but we shall separate as we meet, as far apart, quite as far, or perhaps even farther.'

And even as Hartas predicted, so it came to pass.

## CHAPTER XXXVIII.

### BARBARA BURDAS AND HARTAS THEYN.

'The eyes smiled too,  
But 'twas as if remembering they had wept,  
And knowing they should some day weep again.'

HEARING footsteps upon the garden path behind him—footsteps waited for, listened for long—Hartas turned with a crimson tide of emotion flushing all his face. Two figures were coming towards him—Barbara Burdas and his sister Thorhilda. But for a second or two he hardly recognised the former, and the very strangeness about her enabled him to recover himself. Was this young yet stately-looking woman, dressed in quiet, simple mourning of no antiquated date, yet far enough removed from the fashionable—was this Barbara Burdas? He had to assure himself by an effort.

Considering the shortness of the time since the first appearance of Damian Aldenmede at Ulvstan Bight, certainly the change in Barbara Burdas was very great, and said much for her powers of adaptability—yet, nay, what a low word is that to use! She had adapted herself to nothing. In some ways she had found her own, yet that but scantily, scarcely. She had much yet to find, though, to her credit be it said, she hardly knew even that. She only knew that as yet certain desires within her were all unfulfilled.

All the way Barbara was being led step by step, not knowing whither she went, not knowing why she was led onward at all. That she should be accused of the vain and vulgar ambition of



desiring social advancement did not occur to her, nor, for the honour of the humanity about her be it said, did it occur to others.

She was not at all aware that when she advanced so tremulously to meet Hartas Theyn in Mrs. Kerne's garden she was other than the Barbara Burdas she had always been—the change, so it seemed, was in him.

The first few moments were only made endurable by the presence of Miss Theyn, who understood the difficulty of this first meeting, and now, as always, had enough of sympathy to offer. If she felt any pain she was successful in hiding it. Turning to her brother, seeing his sad, white, unhopeful face, then looking upon Barbara, admiring the tall, fine figure of the girl, seeing how the dark, bronzed face was paled by intense thought, intense suffering, how the light of new perception was visible in the deep blue eyes—seeing these things, she could not but be surprised by the alteration she saw. She had not dreamed that a few short days, or weeks, or even months, could work such change in any human personality.

There was a moment that might have been awkward but for Barbara's adequate and straightforward courtesy.

'You are better?' she said, looking into the face that was watching hers so eagerly, so yearningly.

She took the hand Hartas held out—a hand so white, so thin, so tremulous, that her heart ached to see it.

'Yes, I am all right now,' he replied with pallid lips and somewhat troubled tone. Then he added: 'It was good of you to come and see me.'

'The Canon wished it,' she said simply.

'And you would do anything he wished?'

'Yes, *anything*! He could never ask me to do aught I wouldn't be glad to do.'

'That is high praise from you?'

'I didn't mean it for praise,' Bab said, discerning instantly the unbecomingness of praise of hers bestowed upon one like Canon Godfrey. 'I didn't mean it for *that*! I only meant to say that I'd that regard for him that I'd never had for no one in my life afore, and, as I think, can never have for no one again.'

'Not for Mr. Aldenmede?' Hartas asked, wishing the word unsaid so soon as it escaped him.

'No, not even for him. He's good; but it's not quite the same sort of goodness. . . . He's different altogether.'

Hartas was not ill-pleased to hear this eulogy of one not only closely connected with himself, but well-disposed toward him; and the change, the new power of perception visible in Barbara, was impressing him more at every turn of her every phrase. Her grammar might be defective, but the utterance of almost every word was pure and true, and for him the inflection of each tone had the charm, the winningness, that only love can lend. Yet his heart did not rise to the charm—rather did it sink, depressed, un-  
hopeful.



Quite unperceived Miss Theyn had left these two together, and now they were walking slowly along under the belt of all but leafless trees that divided the wide garden from the paddock where Mrs. Kerne's pony was grazing at his ease. The afternoon was warm and yellow and hazy; a late rose or two leaned out from the garden beds as if craving notice for having bloomed in November, and a very grove of hollyhocks stood in a corner, late, straggling, and with only a few half-developed flowers on the top of each tall stem.

'Are they English flowers, those?' Barbara asked, touching a soft, pale pink hollyhock with her black cotton glove. 'I was reading of some foreign flowers the other night in a book Mr. Aldenmede lent me, and I asked him about them afterward. The strangest flowers they are—orchids they call them. There'll be some i' this garden, I reckon?'

'Don't talk of things like that, Barbara—not now, not to-day,' Hartas pleaded, and there was something strangely touching in his pleading. All the old roughness—the almost rudeness—was gone, and in the place of these things there was a gentleness, a wistfulness, a refinement, that had more power to move than Barbara was prepared to resist.

'Don't speak of those things,' he begged. 'Have you nothing else to say to me? You don't know how I've been hoping that you had—hoping against hope. . . . Have you forgotten that you saved my life? that but for you I shouldn't have been here?'

Barbara gently interrupted him.

'You were drifting in,' she said, lifting a face which had all the recollection of that strange time written on the features of it.

'Perhaps; but it must have been very slowly. And who can say that I should have lived to touch the land? But let that pass, I know in my own mind that I owe my life to you; and I am glad that I do. . . . I've heard it said that people always think kindly of anybody they've done a good turn to. . . . But I'm not going to take advantage of that. . . . I know you would have done the same for anybody else.'

'So I should if I'd been moved in the same way,' Bab replied quietly.

'Still, I can never forget.'

'Nor can I.'

'No; but it will not mean the same thing to you. I see that. . . . I think I saw it before, and I made up my mind not to weary you with the old entreaty. . . . You know what I mean, Barbara—what is in my thoughts.'

'Yes; I know, and you are right in not pressing it. It is wise and kind of you to have made up your mind not to do that.'

She spoke so calmly, with such quiet self-possession, that it was not possible for Hartas to discern how her heart was sinking with every word she uttered, sinking for the need of love, the return of that love she was being drawn to give so lavishly. Her very



strength, contrasted with Hartas Theyn's present weakness, seemed a new reason for new and increasing love. Yet when did love ever stand in need of reason? 'Because it was he; because it was I.' That is the beginning and the end of love's reasoning.

Hartas did not reply for a while to Barbara's seemingly cold speech. He could not, being chilled and hurt. At last he said simply, 'Thank you,' but he said it in so weary a way, with lips so pallid and eyes so sad, that Barbara could not part from him thus.

'Try to understand me,' she said. 'I'm trying—trying to do what seems right; and all the more I'm striving, because everybody seems so kind and good. Think of Canon Godfrey, of how he speaks to me, how he looks at me, and how he thinks for me. If I were the greatest lady in the land he could care no more. And then Miss Theyn, your sister. . . .'

'Well, what of her?' Hartas interposed with a touch of the old hastiness.

'Oh, I could say so much of her! How can I begin? She is so different,' Barbara began enthusiastically. 'She is so very different from anybody else I have ever known or seen.'

'She's at the root of all your hesitation—of all my sorrow,' Hartas broke in again.

Barbara thought for a moment.

'That's only true in one sense,' she replied. 'It is because I know Miss Theyn, and see what your wife ought to be, that I cannot say the word you want me to say. From the very first hour I saw her I knew that she was the kind of lady you should have, that if any good were to come to you, any upliftin' (forgive the plain speaking), you should marry some one as much above you as your sister is, instead of one so much below you as I am. Your father sees this; he shows it in the very way he looks at me. And Mrs. Kerne knows it, and Mrs. Godfrey; they can't help but know. And they all feel, and one way or another they make me feel, that I am the one thing that stands in the way of your betterin' yourself by marriage. Excuse the plain words—I've none better. But now think for a minute, how could I say that word you want me to say, an' keep a shred of self-respect afterward? I could not do it. But there! . . . I've said overmuch. You're none too strong yet. Won't you go into that little summer-house and sit down?'

'No; I don't want to sit down. I'm not tired—not with that sort of tiredness.'

Then presently Hartas stopped and turned, and took the girl's hand in his, fixing his dark, sad eyes upon her lovely, yet much pained face.

'I said I would make no plea,' he began tremulously; 'but I cannot, I cannot help it! It is so terrible! How shall I bear it? How shall I face the future at all? . . . Is that your last word? . . . Would it make any difference if my sister herself came and asked you to be my wife?'



Barbara was nearly as pale as Hartas himself was. The conflict within her was passionately strong.

'I cannot say that it wouldn't make a difference,' she replied. 'I might yield, *I might*; but I should always know that in one way or another she had been forced, overcome. . . . And no happiness could come of it, believe me—no happiness that could last; none for you, none for me. . . . I cannot say all that's in me. There's a deal one can find no expression for; and I think and feel so many things that I cannot say in words. . . . Sometimes I think of your sister's marryin', as they say she's about to do, that son of Lady Meredith's.'

'She's not *Lady Meredith*,' Hartas interrupted brusquely.

'Isn't she? They always call her so over at the Howes. But anyhow, if your sister is to be her daughter, how would they like to meet me—*me*, a flither-picker off the scaur? How would Mrs. Percival Meredith like to have to say to the grand people about her, "This is my sister-in-law—this bait-gatherer." . . .'

'How much do you look like—like that this afternoon?'

Barbara blushed, for once a little self-consciously.

'It's not looks. I am *that*—just that. And oh, how could you ever dream that foolish dream, knowing what you did know, even then! I didn't know! I wish I had known—I *wish* I had. But I didn't. . . . And now there's only one thing,' Barbara continued, lifting a pathetic, beseeching face to the sad eyes that were watching her. 'There's only one thing left for us. Can it be? Will you let it be? Will you be my friend?'

'*Friend*, in that sense? No, *never*!' Hartas replied with vehemence. 'It couldn't be—it could *never* be! Friends! you and me! Think of the torture of it!'

'Torture!' Barbara repeated in surprise. 'Torture! I was thinking of it as bein' only a happiness. . . . You don't know what it would be to me. I'm so lone at times, so desperate lone. . . . I'd not weary you, not if I knew!'

Her very pleading, the pathos of it, the 'sweet reasonableness,' were more than Hartas could bear just then.

'It cannot be,' he said again. 'I could never stand it; no, never. If there's nothing else left we'd better part! . . .'

'Well, then, let us part kindly,' Barbara said, speaking with increased effort. 'Then if by chance we have to meet anywhere, we'd meet without more—more pain than need be.'

The sun had gone down cold and wan behind the leafless ash-trees; a damp, misty air was coming over the fields, over the brown moor beyond. Hartas shivered and turned away, white and desponding.

'Pain! There's nought else but pain nowhere. The world's full of pain. . . . I wish—I wish you had left me to drift on to death in peace!'

Barbara made no reply. They were near the little gate that led out into the lane; and half unconsciously their pace grew slower and slower. It was Hartas who broke the silence at last.



'Forgive me ; I pray you to forgive me,' he said in a tone and manner quite unlike his own. 'I did not mean that—no, God knows I did not ; and He alone knows what my gratitude is. . . . I must be miserably weak, for I meant all to be so very different to-day. . . . It was that overcame me—the idea of parting. How can I bear it ? And you seemed to take it so lightly, so easily.'

They were standing by the gate now, facing each other. The last moment was near. Barbara held out her hand, and on her face was the betrayal that few can see and misunderstand.

'Did you suppose that I could add my pain to yours ?' she asked, suppressing the deep undertone of feeling that struggled below.

'Then it is pain to you ?'

'Look in my face, and see,' Barbara replied, quite unconsciously quoting from one of the most beautiful and touching poems in the English language.

'Then if it be so—if I may know even that—I think I can bear—I *think* I can. . . . Yet—yet it is hard !'

A moment or two longer they stood there in the deepening twilight, hand in hand, heart beating to heart, loving, suffering, silent.

Each feared to add to the other's sorrow by uttering the final last word. The after-glow had faded from the sky ; darkness was beginning to overspread the earth with all the strange stillness that darkness brings.

'I must go,' Barbara said at last, thinking of the little ones at home—especially of the baby, who now sometimes seemed the best loved of them all, and certainly needed most of her loving attention.

'I must go. . . . And in spite of what you said, I'll look to you when I want a friend.'

'Come to me when you want friendliness. . . . I'd always do aught I could, you'd know that.'

'But you won't be all a friend might be to me ?'

'No. . . . It must be more, or less. And you've said it is to be less.'

'Good-night, then. . . . You'll understand me better some day.'

'I think I shall,' Hartas replied quietly, sadly, yet with deep significance in his tone. '*I will think, even yet, that there will come a time for better understanding.*'

## CHAPTER XXXIX.

### THE BANDS OF FATE TWINE CLOSER AND YET CLOSER.

'Seldom comes the moment  
In life, which is indeed sublime and weighty  
To make a great decision possible.'

COLERIDGE.

WHILE all these things had been happening in the Bight down below, life had not been standing still on the higher ground. At last



Damian Aldenmede had become acquainted with Percival Meredith—at last he had come to know that everywhere it was being said that Mr. Meredith was engaged, or ‘all but engaged,’ to Miss Theyn. He had felt a momentary stun, then disbelief had followed. When he came to know Mr. Percival Meredith but a little more intimately, his disbelief had become tinged with scorn. Thorhilda Theyn, a pure, noble-minded, high-toned woman to marry a man like that! But there thought paused awhile; the artist was not the man to discolour his own soul by even a momentary dwelling upon the imperfections of another. Having spent one evening in the society of Mr. Percival Meredith, he felt no more inclination to disturb himself. That he should make a friend of such a man being an utter impossibility, was it not a thousand times more impossible that Miss Theyn should accept him for her husband, her companion, her friend, her guide for life? Ah! why trouble himself for a second with the gossip of one village, or of two? And the more he thought the more certainly he convinced himself. Seeing in imagination, in memory, those pure, far-seeing, and far-seeking gray eyes looking into his, betraying all their depth of tenderness, all their assurance of strength, then turning to that other face, those other eyes with all their disclosures of selfishness, of narrowness, of other things to which he put no name—how could he trouble himself any further? And yet the trouble did not quite die down.

It might have gone lower than it did but for a brief conversation he had had with Gertrude Douglas, whom he had met one morning, by untoward accident, on the promenade. Miss Douglas was looking very beautiful, feeling full of power—the power that comes of youth, of beauty, of health, of the consciousness of social adequateness.

‘Ah, is it *you*, is it *really you*?’ she exclaimed in her wonderfully sweet, and liquid and musical voice. Her words, her pretty laugh, came like a rippling rain of music. ‘How unusual it is to see you on the promenade! I thought you despised all such frivolities?’

‘No; I trust that contempt is not much in my way.’

‘Oh, I don’t know about that!’ Miss Douglas exclaimed, all unaware that she was treading upon the thinnest ice. ‘I thought you looked dreadfully scornful at the Hartoft’s the other evening—especially when you looked at poor Mr. Meredith!’

Then Gertrude laughed a little, and blushed, and let her long dark eyelashes droop over her unperceptive eyes in a very effective way.

No answer coming—none being possible to Damian Aldenmede—she went on again, quite as unconsciously as before.

‘Of course I didn’t wonder; nobody who knew as much as I know could have wondered. . . . But don’t be too much cast down; it isn’t a settled thing yet. . . . However, I suppose it will be soon. There is to be another grand dinner-party at the Rectory on the



22nd, and I expect it will be announced that evening. . . . You will be there, of course ?'

'No ; I shall not,' Aldenmede replied, turning away with the scantiest courtesy, and not able at that moment to weigh all the contradictions and insinuations that he had heard in their proper balance. Entering his lodging a few minutes later, and finding the invitation to the dinner-party Miss Douglas had spoken of lying on his writing-table, he could have groaned aloud for the folly that had led him to declare his intention so prematurely. Yet the strain of perverseness that is in every nervous man or woman would not permit him to accept the pleasure now—for pleasure it would have been, however mingled with pain. He had pain enough as it was ; every recollection of the past, every thought of the future, had its own separate suffering. Even his face grew crimson, remembering that moment in the coastguardsman's cottage, when he had at least betrayed himself to himself, and hoped—in a certain sense—that he also had betrayed the truth to her. Yet no sign had been given to him—or if any, then only such as must for ever forbid his hoping. He had watched ; he had sought her presence ; he had refrained from seeking it : yet by no effort could he extract any sign. The least response to his advances, the least seeming acceptance of his evident desire for—for friendship, to put it at its lowest ; the smallest sign of any hint would have given him hope. But in his worst moments he could do this justice to Miss Theyn—that she had not falsely allured him.

\* \* \* \* \*

And meantime, how was it with Miss Theyn herself ? Not well. None who knew could make answer that it was well with her. To be drawn by all that is best and purest within you and about you on an upward road, yet to know and feel yourself gradually gliding downward, can never produce aught save an absolute misery. Ignore that misery how you will, call it by what name you will, the thing remains the same, as sooner or later you must know.

In excuse for her only this may be said, that she had not divined the full depth of the feeling Damian Aldenmede already had for her. Half unknowingly, yet *only half*, she had checked the advance he would have made ; she had dreaded his coming farther, nearer, even while she had hoped that he would *insist* upon coming. There was *his* defect. He should have treated as straws all that stood in the way of the end he desired.

In excuse for him there was this—in his former life he had loved, he had been betrayed, and he had suffered. What wonder, then, that he did not rise lightly, not gladly, to the new hope that was before him ? How could he even know with any sureness that he might dare to hope ?

Thorhilda was quite aware of the fact that she had not given him one particle of encouragement, yet there were moments when she felt more than half inclined to blame him for doubt, for vacil-



lation ; and these moments came usually when she was feeling with a dread akin to terror that her time for vacillation was now growing perilously short. Day by day she discerned more clearly in the manner of almost everyone about her—her Aunt Milicent, Mrs. Meredith, Percival himself—that her decision, one way or the other, must be made soon—her binding, irrevocable decision.

Yet, despite this previous sense of preparation, the moment came suddenly. She felt, she hardly knew how, that a net had been drawn about her.

For days past there had been a sort of uncomfortable electricity in the air. The ostensible cause of this was a dinner-party to be given at Yarburgh Rectory on the 22nd of November. 'It was to be a large party, almost unprecedentedly large ; many of the guests were to come from afar, many to stay all night.

'It is due to Percy as well as to you, dear, to make an occasion of it,' Mrs. Godfrey had said gently.

And Thorhilda, understanding in a strange, surprised sort of way, had made no reply save such as was conveyed by a hot, sudden blush, a pained glance, and a hasty retirement to her own room. . . . More than ever Mrs. Godfrey was pleased with her own little diplomacies.

It was on that same evening that Percival Meredith came in quite accidentally. Miss Theyn, altogether unsuspecting, had been persuaded by her aunt to dress a little earlier than usual, and had come down to find Mr. Meredith there in the drawing-room alone. There was no lamplight as yet, only the bright cheerful glow of the fire, the ruddy warmth lighting up even the farthest corners of the wide artistically-decorated room.

For a second Thorhilda showed her embarrassment ; then she came forward with a dignity, a self-possession that Percival Meredith admired even while feeling almost overpowered by it. It was very natural that there should be a moment's pause between the two ; and it would have been difficult to say which was the first to recover.

It was Percival Meredith who spoke first.

'It may seem a crude thing to say, perhaps almost cruel,' he began, in tones not free from tremulousness, 'but do you know I am almost glad that the time before us is so brief. We have only a few minutes, but surely, since we understand each other so well, have understood each other so long, *one* minute might be enough. . . . I have so little to say that you do not know. It has all been said so often, so long ago . . . and—and *do* admit it, Hilda dear, I have been so patient. . . . I won't even yet say that my patience has come to an end ; it could never do that while there was any hope at all. . . . But surely you won't strain it any longer ! I have *insisted* that no pressure should be put upon you by others ; I have demanded *that* from your aunt and from my mother ceaselessly. I have entreated them to let me have my own way : assuring them that I understood you better than they could do. . . . You will



justify my speaking so strongly, so emphatically—I know you will. The love I have for you in my own heart tells me that you will do that. . . . I don't yet feel elated in any way, still less triumphant; do you know, it seems to me as if I could never for a moment feel any real elation in the matter. I must always, however happy I may be, still feel subdued in my happiness, I may almost say humiliated, because of my unworthiness. . . . Don't think that I am speaking untruly, or exaggerating what I feel; at least tell me that you have no thought of that kind.'

'I have not,' Thorhilda replied, speaking truly.

And in that moment she had no reason for doubting anything that Mr. Meredith had said. Doubt, suspicion, was not natural to her at any time; and in this moment of perturbation it was not likely that she should suddenly put on or acquire such undesirable qualities as these.

Yet she could not, even now, say the word that was asked of her. The timepiece on the mantelshelf pointed to three minutes to seven. Her uncle was always punctual, only putting down the Bible or Prayer-book he held in his hand when the last moment came. This both Thorhilda and Percival Meredith knew.

'Then if you have no doubt of me,' Percival urged, coming nearer to her, taking her hand in a warm loving grasp, 'if you do not doubt me, if you do not doubt my love, what *can* hinder you from saying the one word I want?'

There was a footstep on the stair, a bell ringing in the hall; then the door opened behind them, and Redshaw entered with the lamp.

'I will write to you—I will write to-night,' Thorhilda said in a hurried whisper as Mrs. Godfrey entered the room by the further door.

'*And your letter will contain a definite answer?*' Percival Meredith urged in tones no less fervid than her own.

'Yes, yes.'

'*You will say yes or no; please, promise me this!*'

Before Thorhilda could reply, Mrs. Godfrey was there between them, her purple satin gown with all its ribbons and laces rustling impressively; a hand was held out in congratulation to each, her eyes were bright with ready sympathetic tears.

'It is settled; it is all settled and decided!' she began, almost sobbing in her emotion.

Thorhilda had no heart to undeceive her; nay, now she had no desire. It would be decided so soon, and surely, surely, it must be as her Aunt Milicent was thinking.

Very naturally Percival Meredith had no wish to interpose. He felt that the chain was being tightened precisely in the direction he wished. And there was good advice in the old proverb, 'Let well alone.'



## CHAPTER XL.

## A NIGHT OF QUESTIONING.

THE more insight a man acquires into human nature, the more it seems possible to him that a human life may be lived from the cradle to the grave without once even for one whole hour having been seriously brought face to face with any serious human problem.

Thorhilda Theyn imagined that she had faced many problems, and, as we have seen, her life was no thoughtless, careless life. Her character had always been a more or less perplexing and contradictory one. Her uncle Godfrey, discerning the inconsistencies of her temperament while she was yet quite young, had done his utmost to bring about certain changes, certain developments which should tend to a greater harmony, and his efforts had been by no means unavailing. The very difficulty he had had, the mere fact that he had watched over so many struggles, noted so many small conquests, witnessed the growth of such a sweet affectionateness, the dawning and increasing of an intellect so clear, so full of fine perception, the strengthening of all impulses towards things good and right and pure and true, the very fact that it had been his duty, his pleasure, thus to watch over her, to endeavour to influence her, had drawn the bond of affectionate relationship closer and closer between them. No father or daughter could have been nearer to each other, or dearer. Yet the Canon had never allowed his tenderness to blind him. He knew of the struggle that was going on now ; it may be that he understood its true nature better than Thorhilda herself did. And if he said but little, he prayed the more, not dreaming how his prayer was to be answered.

Percival Meredith stayed to dinner that evening, declaring that he had not intended it, in proof of which he glanced towards his morning-coat ; and when, after dinner, Thorhilda and her aunt entered the drawing-room together, arm-in-arm, they found Gertrude Douglas there—a thing that often happened—she was always made welcome.

‘It must be so dreadfully dull for her at home,’ Mrs. Godfrey would remark to her husband. ‘And with all her talent for sociability, it seems such a pity that she should be buried night after night the winter through in that most dingy of little parlours.’

‘But the father and mother !’ the Canon said suggestively.

‘Ah, they have lived their life ! Gertrude is not, unhappily, very young ; but all her life, her true life, is yet to live. . . . Oh, I think of her often ! There is no one in all this neighbourhood suitable for her ; and when Thorhilda is happily settled I shall certainly try to do something for Gertrude—take her to some southern watering-place for a couple of months, or even go abroad with her. . . . There is no one else to do anything to help her ; and if she was



as attractive as Circe herself, she could not round the chances of her life in a neighbourhood like this. . . . And she is so clever, so charming, so amiable—oh ! I *must* turn my attention to her when this is over.'

It was not often that Canon Godfrey said a severe thing, or aught that had even the shadow of severity about it. But his eyes were not closed.

'I have no wish to interfere for one moment with one kindly intention of yours, my dear Milicent,' he replied ; 'but I have a firm impression that Miss Douglas is quite equal to taking care of herself. It seems to me even probable that if she had been less evidently equal, less effort had been needed on the part of her friends. . . . Most men like to do what I did myself—to discover for themselves the goodness, the truth, the real beauty of character of the woman they would *choose* for their wife. . . . Nothing distresses me so much as to think of effort being made, even of the slightest, to interfere with absolute freedom of choice—if, indeed, that is the right word—but it is not. True men, true women have no choice in the matter. It is almost a vulgarism in these days to say that marriages are made in heaven ; my feeling certainly is this, that the happiest and highest marriages are not *made* at all—they are the result of most inevitable laws. One feels that *this* had to be ; this, and no other.'

'Ah, well ! you are a little Quixotic, dear ; you always were in such matters as these—not that I have thought any the less of you for that.'

The Canon understood Miss Douglas better than his wife did ; and yet even he did not comprehend her shallow nature to its last widening ring. On this evening she was a little perturbed by something that had happened at home ; and her perturbation took the form it often did, making itself evident in a restless, glittering, fascinating excitement of word and manner. For an hour or so after the two gentlemen had come back to the drawing-room she took the lead in conversation, and her uncertainly-directed effort was not unsuccessful. Part of the time she walked up and down the room, declaring herself utterly unable to sit still.

'I know what you must be thinking of me,' she said laughingly, as she turned once more, her rose-coloured dress shining as she came nearer the lamp, the large and fine outlines of her figure showing to more and more advantage. 'I know what you must be thinking. I once read a novel, years ago—it seemed to me stupid and antiquated even then ; now I believe that it, and the set it belongs to, are all the fashion among people of culture. I haven't any culture, I never had, and therefore I don't admire "*Pride and Prejudice*," nor any other of Miss Austen's novels. Yet I will say this—you can't forget them ! Just now myself reminded myself of a certain scene : A young lady, a Miss Bingley, is walking about a drawing-room one evening, and the gentleman to whom her attentions are directed perceives that she has a good figure, and has taken this



method of displaying it. I never get up to walk about for five minutes without thinking of that scene.'

'A proof of the graphic forcefulness of Miss Austen's writing,' Canon Godfrey interposed.

'And yet, Uncle Hugh,' Thorhilda replied, 'with the exception of the characters of Emma Woodhouse and Anne Elliot, there are not many characters one would care to choose as patterns in life; and Emma is as charming by reason of her faults as of her virtues. The whole atmosphere of Miss Austen's novels is full of a charm all her own; yet surely it is not so very elevating, not so very full of incentive to live and move by the highest standard of all. For instance, everyone in marrying, or, in giving in marriage, thinks first of a decent settlement.'

'That is precisely why and where I *can* admire her novels,' Gertrude Douglas broke in, cutting in two the very sentence in which Thorhilda had meant to explain something of her own ideal—perhaps to the benefit of more than one listener present there.

'That characteristic of her books would alone be sufficient to win me to her side,' Miss Douglas declared, with an openness of revelation meant to be enchanting, but which was more or less of a shock to at least one listener. 'It is the merest hypocrisy to declare that poverty may be preferable to wealth, and we all of us know it—that is, all of us to whom the word "poverty" brings any meaning whatever. But what do you know of it, Thorda dear? What can you ever know? . . . I don't want to speak of myself—it is not good taste, I am aware. . . . But in all your life you have never suffered so much as I have done this week because one of my father's two farms is unlet and he cannot find a tenant.'

And then even Miss Douglas's fine powers of self-sustenance gave way in a slight measure. She still continued to walk to and fro between the lamplight and the shade; but only those who watched her closely could see the tears that heightened the lustre of her bright eyes, the quivering that deepened the pathos of her beautiful mouth.

'I know you are friends, all of you,' she continued by-and-by, with most pathetic tones in her liquid and musical voice. 'If you had not been, I could not have spoken so. . . . And I have said nothing—*nothing* of all that I might have said, of all that even this seemingly slight matter means to me. . . . I would not have spoken at all but for your sake, Thorda dear, that you might feel to the full how happy you are, what splendid reasons you have for being happy!'

Thorhilda was sitting upon the sofa by her aunt's side; she was soon overcome by this unusual display of emotion. Percival Meredith, sitting opposite to her, staring into the glowing fire, seemed lost in a very mist of perplexity. He hardly dared to lift his eyes to the tearful face of Miss Douglas; yet, for the first time, her voice sounded strangely winning in his ears, strangely charged with some new spell of enchantment. Was this indeed the voice



he had listened to so often? Were these the tones he had heard with such indifference?

There were no signs of any further breaking down on the part of Miss Douglas; yet by-and-by Thorhilda drew her away to her own room, where a cheery fire was burning, with an easy-chair pushed forward to the fender, a pale blue dressing-gown laid ready, with fur-lined slippers, cashmere shawl, and tiny gipsy-table with its tray of lovely china all prepared for the last cup of hot chocolate. Brushes were spread out upon the toilette-table, hot water ready in the cans, a maid was waiting in the dressing-room that was between Thorhilda's room and the one occupied by Miss Douglas.

Gertrude Douglas understood all that was to be decided that night to the full—perhaps even better than Miss Theyn herself understood.

Was it *only* during the last few hours that a new and strange idea had taken possession of Gertrude's mind and heart?

Had the uplifted face, the admiring eyes, the expression of deep sympathy she had discerned while watching Percival Meredith aught to do with the attitude she displayed now? Thorhilda was instantly aware of change.

'Do think of it all, dear—do think seriously,' Miss Douglas begged, seating herself in the depth of the easiest of easy-chairs, and sinking back exhausted with the contending emotions of the evening. 'Do *think*! It is not a matter of life and death, but it is all-important so far as life is concerned. Have courage, dear. If you *cannot* love him as you feel you ought to love your future husband, *do* dare to say so! . . . And if there should be anyone else—I don't mean anyone in particular—but if there *should* be, do not let anything that I have said come between you. After all, wealth or poverty, what is it? It is only for this life, dear!'

For almost the first time the ring of—not falseness, but of the want of certain coherent sincerity, smote upon the heart and brain of Thorhilda as an outward blow had done. She raised her head from Miss Douglas's knee, said 'good-night' in a kind of stupor, and went to her own room, dispensing with the services of her maid for that night.

For awhile she sat alone, not caring to take off even the few ornaments she had worn, but resting her wearied head upon the sofa before the fire.

'Lonely!' she said, in the half-audible whisper that people use who are roused by deep emotion. 'Lonely! How anyone might smile to hear me utter the word! The one intimate friend with which circumstance has provided me is in the next room; the two kindest guardians that ever woman had are in the room below; and the one man whom I know does love me greatly is not half a dozen miles away. . . . Yet, *yet*, I am as lonely as the loneliest woman in the world!'

Presently she rose to her feet, and began walking up and down



the room ; and when her eye caught sight of her writing-table, the paper lying ready, the pens in admired disorder, everything seeming to await that one word she had promised to write, she felt impelled all at once to a new level of thought and emotion.

Was it possible that she had yet a decision to make ? No, that could not be ! . . . Yet she might still unmake one—one made rather by others than by herself.

It was a terrible hour.

A more passionately-loving woman, or one aroused to a deeper depth of passionate human loving, had known no such inner contention.

She had only been partially aware of the betrayal of which Damian Aldenmede had been guilty that night in the coastguardsman's cottage, and it was not in her nature to dwell upon an accidental word wrung from a man by the sight of a woman's suffering.

She had never at any time dwelt much upon the idea that the artist might care for her, nor was she a woman to linger in long reverie over such a possibility. She had been drawn to him—drawn by his superiority over every other man she had met—and she had been fully aware of the fact that he had reciprocated to the full whatever feeling of mere admiration she had given to him. Beyond that she had not *consciously* permitted her thought, her emotion to stray. How far she might be governed by things of which she was largely unconscious she could not know. We none of us know. We are influenced by motives we have never suspected, led by hopes we have never grasped, deluded by visions into which we have never looked. So it is that men find themselves on the edge of precipices from which they start back aghast, like travellers coming to the cliff-top in the thick white mist of autumn evenings. It is well for the traveller who has firm and safe land behind him to retreat upon.

All complications, all pressures notwithstanding, Thorhilda Theyn knew that up to this hour safety was hers. Yet she did not say to herself, as she might have done, that by one strong wrench she might break every strand of the fine network of circumstance by which she was enmeshed.

Of a dozen people knowing the truth as to the battle she fought alone in her own room that night, it is possible that while six might have blamed her, the other six would certainly have been found sad for pity.

It must be remembered that she was still young. Where is the man or woman who has passed from childhood to middle age without making some grievous mistakes ? Who has known nothing of love's treachery ?—of the betrayal of that which 'was not love at all,' but yet came with all fair and plausible seeming and promise of love ?

And Thorhilda Theyn was not only young. Notwithstanding a certain adequate intellectual development, she was still simply and



singularly youthful in many ways; almost impossibly youthful. In the matter of love, and all love's mystic meaning, she was little more than a child

The little she did know she had been told, and that not too wisely. Had she known the truth with regard to herself that night, she would have known that the real love of her heart had yet to be truly awakened.

Yet so long, so persistently had her aunt Milicent, whom she trusted to the uttermost, seemed to consider her love for Percival Meredith a settled thing, that hardly one thought of question on this head seemed to rise up to confront her. And it was not only Mrs. Godfrey who had done this grievous thing; Mrs. Meredith had added her share of the weight of pressure; Gertrude Douglas—until to-night—had added hers. And of late the Canon had been all but silent—silent with a silence that was one day to be his bitterest memory.

So it was that she was left alone to fight with her worst enemy, herself; to see on one hand the luxury, the ease, the freedom from care, the presence of every desirable thing that had come to seem needful to her life. There was no need for imagination here. She saw this strong temptation in its highest light, clearly, distinctly.

And why should she look upon it as a temptation at all? why not accept all that was offered to her in the spirit in which everyone who surrounded her was expecting her to accept it—as a natural result, a natural consequence?

In this question and its answer lay all her difficulty. There was only one answer; and she returned it to herself, shrinking from its full meaning.

'I have not been able to accept the offer of Percival Meredith's hand at once, and without hesitation, because I know that in marrying I should wish to feel that my husband was the best man I had ever seen; the highest-souled I had ever known. I appreciate Mrs. Browning's utterance on this head to the full:

“ Unless you can think when the song is done,  
 No other is soft in the rhythm;  
 Unless you can feel when left by *one*,  
 That all men else go with him.  
 Unless you can know when upraised by his breath  
 That your beauty itself wants proving;  
 Unless you can swear, 'For life, for death!'  
 Oh, fear to call it loving.”

'Is it thus with me? *It is not.* But they say, they all say, that this is only natural, that that deeper, intenser love will come. Perhaps it might have done, perhaps it might, if I had never seen any other man, any higher, nobler, greater. And I believe, I admit it to myself now and here, that that other is as much greater in soul as he is poorer in means. As to whether he cares for me or not, with *that* caring, I do not know, I only dream. Certainly it is



nothing but a dream, and one that, perhaps, could never be realized. Of Percival's love I am very sure. And I mean to live as truly as I can, as nobly\*; but if I fail, shall I not remember? Shall I not see a strong, spiritual face looking into mine, looking sadly, reproachfully, the face of one who would have led me onward and upward, step by step?

Then for awhile thought itself seemed to pause; and the visions that came were not such as to fix themselves on the mind by means of formed words and phrases. And each vision seemed to be twofold, to disclose now this side, now that. At last quite suddenly, as day began to break, worn and wearied with the night's perplexity, Thorhilda threw herself on the sofa by her writing-table and began to write.

'I will think no more, I will hesitate no more,' she said to herself in some agitation. 'I will give my promise to Percival Meredith, and my life to God. . . . May He do with me as He will.'

The note was written in the gray dawn; then Miss Theyn slept awhile, to be awakened by a very hurricane of wind and rain dashing upon her casement; and even then it seemed as if at the foot of the far-off cliffs she could hear the sounding of the sleepless melancholy sea.

'Not the sort of morning one would have chosen to make one's first greeting to "a plighted bride," isn't that the proper phrase, dear?' her aunt Milicent said an hour or two later when Thorda went down. The cheeriest and warmest of coal fires was burning in the wide grate, lighting up the dining-room with a ruddy glow. Mrs. Godfrey kissed the girl with a warm and motherly kiss, on either cheek; the Canon's lips were pressed tenderly to her forehead; and he held her hand awhile, not caring to look much into the face he had read at the first glance.

Presently a bell was rung, the servants came in, and sat down quietly in their places, and the Canon opened his Bible and read:

'The light of the body is the eye: if, therefore, thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light.

'No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.

'Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?

\* \* \* \* \*

'Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.'



## CHAPTER XLI.

‘LATE, LATE, SO LATE!’

‘At peace! ay, the peace of the ocean,  
When past is the storm when we foundered,  
And eager and breathless the morning  
Looks over the waste.’

W. W. STORY.

A DINNER-PARTY of eight-and-twenty people must always mean the mingling of some very different, not to say discordant, elements; and the party given in honour of Miss Theyn’s engagement to Mr. Percival Meredith could be no exception to this interesting rule.

The scene—taking it merely as a scene—was an unusually brilliant one. Certainly—

‘The tabours played their best,  
Lamps above and laughs below.’

And perhaps some present there might afterward have finished the quotation—

“‘Love me” sounded like a jest,  
Fit for yes, or fit for no.’

But Miss Theyn could not be numbered among them. Long afterward it was remarked that she had never looked more beautiful, more winning, more touching, more sad. Many there did not see the sadness. Her quietude was taken for maiden modesty; her wistful, wondering look for the new tenderness always born of love. She moved about the rooms like a very embodiment of grace and beauty, of sweetness, and almost pathetic gentleness. Mr. Egerton (‘the Canon’s curate,’ as Mrs. Kerne was careful always to describe him), watching Miss Theyn on this eventful evening, knew that he had never before seen such outward and visible signs of the inward and beautiful grace of humility. It was not only the down-dropt eyes, the restrained smile, the new paleness; but something in her smile, her grace, her attitude, betrayed to him that all this demonstration of gaiety and festivity, so well and kindly intended, so far as the Canon and his wife were concerned, was not exactly in accord with the inward mood of her for whom it was mainly meant. Mr. Egerton could not quite understand his own feeling. Where all should have been joy, gladness, congratulation, he was moved, all unaware of any reason, to something that was curiously like pity, strangely akin to compassion. And inevitably Miss Theyn discerned how it was with him, and returned the pressure of his hand with a gentle, meaning warmth that he could not forget. Afterward—long, long afterward he understood.

‘Everybody was there!’ Mrs. Kerne said, describing the evening to a friend of hers on the following day. ‘An’ it was the prettiest



dinner-party I ever was at. The dresses was splendid—they really was. My niece Thorhilda wore a cream satin, very plain, very simply made, but very good. It was like an old brocade for that; it would ha' stood by itself splendid. An' she'd some magnificent old lace all about it, real Brussels, 'at had belonged to Mrs. Godfrey's mother; *she* was a cousin of the Duke of St. Dunstan's; that was how the father, old Chalgrove, got the living; and how it came to pass 'at the Duke an' Duchess took such notice of them all. Why, I don't believe 'at the eddication o' that family o' girls ever cost the father sixpence. . . . An' so far so good; but they needn't hold their heads quite so high as they do; though I must say 'at I consider Mrs. Godfrey a real lady down to the toes of her shoes. An' that's more nor I'd ever say for Averil Chalgrove.'

'But you don't mean to say that *she* was there?' inquired Mrs. Kerne's interlocutor, who was none other than Mrs. Monk-Fryston, the wife of the principal lawyer of Market Yarburgh.

'*There!* my dear; yes, and with all her war-paint on, I can assure you. And truth to say, she amazes me! She's forty-seven, if she's a day; and you'd never ha' taken her for much over thirty. Would you believe it, she'd a cream lace dress on; and all tossed off wi' splendid dark red chrysanthemums. An' she'd a great diamond pendant at her throat, half as big again as that 'at poor Kerne gave £60 for the day we'd been married twenty year. She's none a favourite o' mine, she's over proud an' stiff for that; but I'm bound to say she *looked* every inch a lady, an' behaved like one. They *do* do that, them Chalgroves.'

'But who else was there? You have told me nothing yet.'

'Oh, there's none so much to tell. One dinner-party's very much like another. The rooms looked beautiful; the lamps had splendid shades, so had the candles; and the flowers was beyond all description. A lot o' them came from abroad; I got that out of Mrs. Godfrey herself. An' then the music made such a difference——Oh me; if I was a grand lady I'd allus hev music at dinner-time.'

'But who played? surely not any of the guests?'

Mrs. Kerne paused a moment, quite a pitiful look mingling with the look of superior understanding on her face.

'Who played? why the band played, to be sure; the Volunteer band from Danesborough.'

'Oh, really! But wasn't it very loud?'

'Loud? not a bit of it. At first, in fact, we couldn't hear 'em at all. The Canon had asked 'em to play in the courtyard at the back of the Rectory. An' by-an'-by Mrs. Godfrey appealed to me—'twas very nice an' polite of her really--"Mrs. Kerne," she says, "can you hear the band? What do you think? Had we better hev' it a little nearer? Would it be *too* near in the ante-room, d'ya think?"

'So I said no. I thought it 'ud be a deal better; so she sends a message by the butler, an' within five minutes the band was play-



ing just in the next room, so soft, so beautiful, so overcomin' 'at you could hardly help the tears, specially not when they played "Home, Sweet Home," and the "Last Rose o' Summer. Believe me, I put down my knife an' fork upon the finest bit o' partridge ! I couldn't ha' eaten it wi' my heart swellin' so,—no I couldn't ; though I don't make out 'at I'm one of the sofest-hearted sort o' folk. Still, there's moments, I reckon, there's moments i' most lives, an' that was one, certainly that was one !

'But you've not told me yet who the main part of the guests were !' Mrs. Monk-Fryston said with a little querulousness. She had not the suave manner of your true interviewer. But then, the interviewer is like the poet—born, not made.

'Oh, I've no list of 'em,' Mrs. Kerne replied, in a manner meant to be grand, but which was only rude and brusque. 'I've no list of 'em ; an' titles don't dazzle *me*, as they do some folk. I saw no more in Lord Hermeston than I did in the Canon, maybe not so much. An' as for Sir Robert an' Lady Sinnington, well, if it weren't for the title I reckon they'd never be received into no first-rate society.'

'You don't say so ! . . . But Lady Thelton now, wasn't she there ?'

'Of course she was ; no party at the Rectory would be complete without *her*. And very handsome and stylish she looked with her rubies, and her point lace, and her dark red velvet dress. . . . But I make nought of all that ! What did take me, was her real politeness. She spoke to me about the engagement as feelingly as if my niece had been my own daughter. In truth, altogether, I was struck with the way in which everybody seemed to be interested. In point of fact, it was a real sensation ; an' so *he* seemed to think. As for her—my niece—well, I must say she was more like a white marble statue than a girl just engaged to be married. And with all these grand folks about her ; and all makin' so much to do, I didn't, at the bottom of my heart, think it was quite nice of her. But then she was always one o' that sort, sweet anuff, an' nice anuff in her own way—but then, her way *was* her own, an' it was a little bit "stuck up," as the sayin' goes ; but if I didn't altogether like it, *I'd* no need to give in to it ; an' I never did. Yet, I'll do her the justice to say as she never resented it, never bore me no ill-will. She was as sweet last night as if we'd allus been the best friends in the world. She's no bitterness about her.'

'And Mr. Aldenmede, the artist, wasn't *he* there ? I've heard more than one say that he had ideas about Miss Theyn himself. They've been seen talkin' on the beach over and over again.'

Mrs. Kerne's smile was wonderful to see, it was so superior, so pitiful, so full of never-to-be explained meaning.

'*Him* have ideas ! No doubt. But if my niece isn't very sharp, she's not quite a fool ! An' as for him bein' asked to dine at the Rectory on such an occasion as that—well, it wasn't very likely.'

Such was the terrible drift of the gossip that was circulating



almost everywhere. It was well for Thorhilda that she did not even dream of it.

She had made her choice ; she would abide by it—so she was determining while everyone about her was congratulating her on the happiness of her choice.

For some days she avoided any moment of calm reflection, and this of set purpose. Miss Douglas was asked to come and stay at the Rectory, to occupy the room next to Thorhilda's ; and each night the last, worst moments were passed in conversation that seldom came near the one matter predominant above all others in Thorhilda's heart and soul. It was strange, and Gertrude Douglas knew it to be strange, that she was hardly permitted to mention the name of Percival Meredith.

'You are so different from me, dear,' she said one night as she sat by Thorhilda's fire, her long, pretty brown hair flowing over her pale pink flannel dressing-gown, her dark, bright eyes alight with interest, with curiosity. 'You are so different from me ! If I loved anyone, I think I should wish always to be near them, or at any rate always near to someone who would talk to me of the one I loved. And you—you seem to shrink if I mention Mr. Meredith's name ! Why is it ? Do you know why ? Are you conscious of it at all yourself ?'

Thorhilda was silent for a moment—silent and even paler than usual.

'I think I am only conscious so far,' she said at last. 'It seems now such a terrible matter ; for life or for death. There is no escape.'

'Escape ! My dear child, what an odd word to have in your head ! Escape from Percival Meredith ! from Ormston Magna ! from nearly three thousand a year ! My dear, cautious-speaking old father says two thousand five hundred. And you speak of escape ! My child, are you insane ?'

'I am not sure,' Thorhilda said slowly. 'I am not sure ! You are putting words to thoughts that have been in my mind for some time. What is sanity—pure, clear, human sanity ? . . . I am not so sure that I know !'

This was beyond Miss Douglas ; she laughed a low, sweet, empty laugh, drew Thorhilda down to the sofa by the fire, and held her younger friend's hand affectionately in her own.

'Don't tempt Providence, dear,' she said with sufficient solemnity. 'I am not an envious person—if I were, I should envy you from the bottom of my heart. It seemed to me that you have everything any human being could wish for. You have a good home—I might say a luxurious one ; but I know that that would pain you ; you have the kindest of kind friends ; and now, to crown all, the Prince comes by. He throws himself at your feet ; and after long enough probation, you bid him rise and allow him to kiss the tips of your fingers. Having done that, you put on a melancholy air as if the sacrifice were too much for you.'



All this was far too near the truth to be quite pleasant ; and it was small wonder that Miss Theyn avoided such conversation as much as was possible. Yet she could not avoid the growing sense of being bound, irrevocably bound.'

'I suppose it is always so,' she said to herself one night, standing alone by the window of her own room.

It was a clear, calm, moonlit night. The trees in the garden stood still and gray, the mystic interweaving of the leafless branches showing against the silver-toned ether beyond. It was a night, a scene, to compel the soul to be truthful to itself, however painful such truth might be ; and Thorhilda Theyn could not escape from that compelling influence.

'I suppose it is so with all thinking women,' she said. 'To have given one's self to another must be to know one's self poorer for the gift ! How strange it is to be called upon to surrender one's very identity. It is certainly fitting and typical that one should lose one's very name. And to be congratulated, felicitated on every hand as if it were the greatest good that had come to one—a good with no drawback, a gain with no loss ! Is that why the whole thing is smothered in finery and the tawdriest of outward show—that a woman may not think—that she may be dazzled by the millinery of the whole affair to such an extent that she may not have time to think of the hereafter ? Is this what marriage means ? Is this the highest ? Is this the best ?

This time of storm and stress lasted for some days after the irrevocable word had been given ; but naturally it wore itself out. It is seldom given to human nature to remain long upon the mountain-peak of any emotion whatever.

Preparations for the marriage were being hurried forward ; in one way or another, things connected with the approaching change in her life came to the surface every hour. Did she need a new gown, or pair of boots ? She was reminded that it would be better to wait a little while—a very little—then to choose this for travelling, that for receptions, and so forth. She was never allowed to forget.

Percival Meredith came and went. He was quiet, happy, never visibly triumphant, or over-assured to any offensive degree. He understood too well for that. He sat on the sofa in the Rectory drawing-room, rather silent, well-bred, distinguished-looking, waiting upon Thorhilda's lightest word, letting no wish or desire of hers escape him. Yet he was never obtrusive, never forward, or *exigeant*.

Mrs. Godfrey marvelled a little at them both. Were these lovers—these two reticent, self-contained people, who spoke of the 'weather and the crops,' 'Shakespeare and the musical glasses,' with such perfect equanimity ? The Rector's wife was even a little impatient at times. Being so full of life, and of all life's minor enthusiasms, herself, it chafed her to watch the unmoved bearing of two people who should have been—so to speak—electric with



sympathy, with emotion; who should have rarified the very atmosphere about them with the fervidness, the intensity of their affection.

'Well,' she said one day to Gertrude Douglas, who was full of understanding as to this perplexing state of things. 'Well, I suppose we are not made alike; but when I remember the last few weeks before my own marriage, and then look at Thorda, I am all bewilderment. Looking back upon myself, upon the state of exaltation I was in, and then turning to watch her—her perfect self-control, her unbroken quietness, her uneager manner, her unfervid glance—I cannot, I *cannot* but dread that all this means indifference. . . . Why should she be so hard to move? She is not cold-hearted—anything but that. Indeed I have always felt that somewhere in her nature there must be a most passionate intensity of lovingness. I had hoped to see it come to the surface now; I felt sure of it. Yet day by day I wait and watch, and the day ends in disappointment.'

'Yet she isn't reserved with one,' Miss Douglas said musingly.

'Reserved! No, not exactly that; nor exactly open. The reserve is somehow thrown upon one's self. I do not—I do not *dare* to speak the simple truth; I do not *dare* to question her, to remonstrate with her. What is there that one could take hold of? She receives Percival with all kindness, all politeness! If she would but once be a little rude, a little brusque, one would dare to speak.'

'But that she will never be,' said Gertrude Douglas, who fell again into that unusual mood of absent-mindedness; and was not again to be roused out of it during the whole of the afternoon. What new and forcible idea had taken possession of her, who should say?

## CHAPTER XLII.

'SOMEWHERE THERE MUST BE LIGHT.'

'The crown and comfort of my life, your favour,  
I do give lost, for I do feel it gone.'

SHAKESPEARE.

OUTWARDLY Barbara's life was going on much as it had always done; but the changes of which she never spoke were not small, not unimportant.

It was no light matter to have an infant to care for in addition to the four children she had cared and toiled for before. True, the neighbours were good, and any fishwife on the Forecliff would take 'Bab's Ildy' for a few hours while Barbara went, as of old, to the flither-beds, or sat at the herring-house 'scaling mussels,' or 'baiting lines,' or mending nets, or doing any of the hundred and one things by which the wives and daughters of the fishermen earn a little money to help in the providing of the household needs. There



was no other house on the Forecliff where the burden of providing for a family fell upon a girl not yet twenty.

Bab had never before suffered much from the narrowness of her narrow means. She had never known anything else. Economy of the closest had been familiar to her from her very childhood. To have a dinner—and that a scanty one—of animal food once a week, on a Sunday usually, was all that she had ever dreamed of.

And Bab had had no lessons in cooking ; she had never seen a scientific scale of diet ; she knew nothing of the various values of various foods. That albumen should not be hardened ; that osmazome should be retained ; that ‘body-warmers,’ and ‘flesh-formers’ should be given in about equal quantities—alas ! all this was unknown to Barbara Burdas ; yet she did her best, obeying instinct, which goes for something, and tradition, which is worth less, but yet is binding when no other light or law is known.

The wonder of it was that Bab herself had always had such splendid health ; her complexion was bright and clear, the carmine tints of it full and vivid ; her deep-blue eyes were as lustrous and as beautiful as if her diet had been regulated by a whole college of physicians. And it was the same with the little ones. The three lads, rude, robust, seemed likely to suffer far more from plethora than from inanition ; and if little Ailsie’s more delicate frame caused greater fear, greater perplexity, this was not shared by any who knew the sacrifice that Bab was even now making.

Over and over, a few pence at a time, she had saved enough to buy this book or that, usually one lent to her by Damian Aldenmede, but which in her natural independence she had declined to keep.

‘I have kept so many,’ she said one evening. ‘Why, there’s over twenty on the shelf upstairs ; an’ your shelves, in your own room, look as bare as can be. It fairly made my heart ache to see them.’

‘It need not,’ Aldenmede replied quite carelessly. ‘I have some other shelves at home, not badly filled.’

Again Bab had looked into his face with that questioning look he knew so well, and which amused him so deeply. Some time he would satisfy her questions by an answer he liked to think of. Meanwhile he found a rather cruel amusement in raising her wonder, her interest, and then watching how she forbore to ask a single question in words that could betray curiosity. Already he was proud of Bab.

But yet how little, how very little, he knew of her real life ! He had acquaintance enough with the interior arrangements of the cottage on the Forecliff not to intrude when the mid-day meal was on the table. How he might have shivered to see six people enjoying a dish made of the boiled udder of a cow ; of a gaunt and spare salted cod’s head ; and yet the dishes were, in their way, nourishing ; witness the boys, whose hardy, rosy cheeks might have made many a richer mother envious ! And almost each evening came a supper that might be more nourishing still. Bab seldom failed to



prepare a big kettle of rice boiled in the quart of skim milk which she could purchase for three-ha'pence ; or to fill the big frying-pan with potatoes and onions, and a scrap of good salted fish if she could get it. It is certain that there were children on the Forecliff worse fed than those brought up by poor, ignorant Bab Burdas.

But it was for little Ailsie, and Nan's baby, that time after time her hoard of money, one shilling or two, had to be taken to buy better food—now a tin of costly-seeming farinaceous food for little Ildy (named Thorhilda in the register of the parish church at Yarrowburgh, but never again till a recent event in her girl-life demanded it). And now the shilling or the sixpence was taken to buy a real mutton-chop ; or a few ounces of real port wine for her little sister who was always so quiet, so pale, yet so bright, so good, so full of small childish sympathies.

It was only by watching, by slowly and silently watching, that David Andoe came to discern what it really meant to Bab to have the charge of his sister's child ; and his instinct led him to perceive that no offer of help on his part would be welcome. Once or twice he had called to see Nan's baby ; he had bent over the cradle where the little one lay sleeping ; not only in quietness and cleanliness, but with some attempt at daintiness all about her. Barbara told him that Miss Theyn had sent the swing-cot, with all its pretty chintz draperies, its loops and bows of rose-red ribbon. A small white counterpane covered the warm blanket. The little Ildy lay smiling upon the soft pillow ; happy, comfortable as the veriest princess of a baby might have been. Bab's pride was touching to see.

David smiled and sighed both in a breath as he watched the child. How did Barbara manage to do all her own work, and yet make possible such home-life as this ? The Sagged House was but very little better furnished than his own home ; yet, ah, the difference !

Here the brick floor was clean and wholesome—at home it was so foul that no one might say whether it was brick or stone. Here the old oaken dresser with its blue plates, its suspended cups and jugs, was a pleasant thing to contemplate ; at home hardly a piece of crockery-ware was to be found that was not dirty, or cracked, or actually broken. And then under the dresser Barbara had ranged her copper tea-kettle, her bright brass pans, her brass candlesticks—heirlooms these for the most part, and seldom to be used in the common daily life. That Bab was a little proud of them was known all over the Forecliff, and helped in some vague way to add to the impression that she was not quite as the other fisher-folk were. David Andoe saw it all again, and again it saddened him to a degree of sadness lower than before. The contrast was too pointed.

There was no pile of ill-smelling nets or lines cumbering the floor here ; no dishes of potato-peeling standing about the floor for elderly and ragged-looking fowls to come in and peck at at their pleasure. Even old Ephraim's sou'wester hung in the tiny pas-



sage, and his sea-boots stood within the door of the coal-shed outside. Barbara was as sensitive to strong odours as any lady of her land.

David did not enter into any details as he sat there. All that he knew, or rather felt, was that he sat by a home fireside where there was warmth, and order, and peace, and the certain security that comes of the presence of but one human being whose character is strong, and stable, and pure. This was rest; this was soothing! Had hope been there, it had been happiness of the finest.

He could not help speaking out of his full heart. His training had not been such as to lead him on to the finer and more perfect restraints.

'It's like bein' in heaven, Barberie, this is!' the poor fellow said, in somewhat pathetic tones, as he drew near to the blazing fire. Old Ephraim was nodding in his chair on the other side of the fire; the children were all in bed and asleep. A lamp burnt clearly and brightly on the table; Barbara sat by the little cot, her knitting in her hand, the needle plying fast, yet not claiming all her attention. Every moment or two she glanced at the little Ildy, touching the cradle to a light rocking movement if the baby seemed restless, leaving it alone if she slept in peace. Bab had had no training in such matters, but her instincts being kindly—nay, loving—reason served her for the rest.

'It is like heaven,' David said in a low, touching voice. Barbara quite understood; and almost trembled in her understanding. But for awhile, suspending her knitting-needles, she tried to think calmly.

'I don't know about *this* bein' much like heaven,' she said at last. 'But, eh, it *does* seem to me that people needn't make their lives so much like—like the other place, as they so often do! It is a mystery.'

'Ay, so it is—but they do do that.'

'It's the want of understanding,' Barbara replied, looking into the fire thoughtfully. 'It's nothing but that—they don't understand. And how should they? There's been none to teach them—none that could see the sort of teaching that poor people wanted. They looked down from above, and comprehended nothing that they saw. They didn't know *why* poor folk's houses was dirty, nor *why* their bit of food was badly cooked; 'repulsive' they would call it, an' so it is to them. But they couldn't trace all this to its beginning—how should they? All they could do was to blame, and blame, and never see to the root of things. . . . But, eh, me! I've hope enough! I see signs on every side. Why, the very books one reads gives one hope 'at they're beginning to see—they that *can* help. Oh, yes, believe me, David, there's hope on every side!'

'Hope for *some*, maybe, not for me,' the poor fellow replied, with sadness in his tone. 'Hope for *some*. May God grant as you'll be one o' them!'



Then he rose to go, standing for another moment or two by the cheery fire, lingering another by the dainty little cot where the baby lay smiling on its soft white pillow. It was hard to go, and Barbara, with compassionate soul and warm heart, fully understood, far too fully for her own peace of mind.

'Don't be downcast, David,' she said, speaking kindly, sadly. 'There's many a one that has more reason to be downcast than you have.'

Was she meaning herself? Was that possible, considering all that had happened of late? David did not know, he felt bewildered, and by-and-by he went away, leaving Barbara Burdas far more unsettled, more saddened, more perplexed than he himself was. After a difficult quarter of an hour, Barbara was glad to hear the familiar click of the latch that betokened the coming of old Hagar Furniss. It was not only that she needed distraction; some impelling instinct within her required more than that.

'Come in, Hagar; come to the fire,' Bab said warmly. 'It's cold anuff outside; but, thank God, we're able to keep a fire going.'

The old woman began to shed quiet, feeble, ineffectual tears, the tears of age, that have in them no passion, no vehemence, nothing to touch any heart not the most sensitive.

'It's well for you, honey,' she said, sobbing gently, speaking gently. 'It's well for you 'at hes a bit o' coal at the hoose end an' a bite bread i' the cupboard! 'Tisn't iverybody can saäy as much.'

'Why, you don't mean to say 'at you're wantin', Hagar?' Bab asked, surprised out of her own troubles. But she did not express her true feeling in words. In a very few minutes there was a comfortable meal spread on the table: tea, and toasted bread and butter, and a boiled egg. Poor old Hagar began to eat at once, in that painful, eager, tremulous fashion that betrays long hunger, long faintness, and need. Bab, her own troubles regaining their dominance, only waited to see the old woman fairly comfortable, fairly satisfied; then, obeying an instinct that was strong within her, she rose to her feet and took out her shawl from the oaken press at the further end of the room, and prepared to go out of doors.

'You won't mind, Hagar—you won't mind my going out for a while. I've not been out since the early morning, and I'm keenly set upon walkin' over the fields for a bit. Can you stay?'

'Can Ah staäy, honey? . . . Why if Ah *mun* tell the truth Ah were wantin' to ask ya if Ah mud sleep here, on the mat by the fire? Ah've seen neither bite nor sup to-daäy, nor a bit o' coal—noä, niver the lowe of a coal fire till Ah come in here to-neet, an' Ah'd niver ha' done that but Ah were fairly starvin'! . . . Let ma staäy Bab, honey—let ma sleep here on the mat! Ah'll do owt Ah can for ya i' the mornin'. Ah'd be right glad to do a bit o' washin'—an' ya mum hev a lot o' that wiv a young bairn to do for!'



Bab's only reply was to bring a spare rug and a pillow from her own bed, and to make the old woman quite cozy on the 'settle' by the fire.

'Now lie there till I come back,' she said. 'An' if ya hear any of the little ones stirring, go an' see what they want. There's Ildy's milk by the fire, an' none o' them else wants nothing till the morning. Gran'father 'll go to bed at eight o'clock. Don't wake him before!'

So Bab went out into the cool dark December night. There was no moon—the tiny silver crescent had gone down behind the hills long before; but the stars shone at their best and brightest, and the world seemed quieter, holier for their far-off shining; and the sea seemed subdued to a gentler movement; the land was wrapt ás in a peaceful dream. Everywhere there was peace, save in Barbara's own soul.

She had seemed to herself to be quiet enough till David Andoe, with all his subdued and unsubdued emotion, had awakened the echoes of that love which she had hoped was dying—yet, oh! so hardly, so very hardly in her own heart. Now she was all unstrung again. The battle had to be fought once more. *Once more!* How many times more? Was her life to be spent in this need of love?

Ah! how many lives are spent—spent exactly thus—in needing love, in craving for it, in trying everywhere to search it out? And one shall find it, and presently lose it again; and another shall find it, and know no good, no beauty in it. How few have life and love, continuance of love—love remaining always for blessing and up-raising!

Was Barbara Burdas going to pass her life thus—in hoping, in finding the end of hope? She thought of it in a vague passing way as she flew onward through the lanes beyond the Bight. There was a flagged pathway through the fields, a descent into a fir copse, a hill to be climbed on the other side; and that the top of the hill was a long three miles from the Forecliff, Barbara was very well aware: yet she did not stop to think of the distance; she was thinking of nothing save a dream that was growing gradually in her own brain—a vision of Yarburgh Rectory, with the windows all alight with splendid lamps and glowing fires. So Thomasin Furniss had described it to her once, when some halibut had had to be taken to the Rectory even while the guests were assembled to eat it. Bab had never forgotten the description of all that Thomasin had seen that evening.

This was no dinner-party, not so far as Barbara knew; and certainly she did not care. She had no desire, no dream, except that but for a moment she might be near to Miss Theyn. That was the one cry that she would allow her heart to make. All the rest could be stifled, it must be stifled; but this might be allowed, surely this! And it would not happen often, perhaps never again; but surely it might be permitted to her for once, just for once, to



walk outside the house where Miss Theyn lived—perhaps even in the garden, if the gates were not shut! And she might see the window of Miss Theyn's room; perhaps even know, from the shadow on the blind, that she was dressing for dinner. Bab had learnt much of late.

And all this detail of vision notwithstanding, there was nothing small at the root of Barbara's ideals. The one motive was the drawing to be for a little while near to one she loved.

Forgive her, if even in this mere drawing there was yet a taint of materialism. It is only the very finest natures of all who can live in love, knowing that this love is growing, strengthening, though actual nearness be not attained for weeks, for months, nay, even for years. The test of time is not only the strongest, it is the most beautiful test of all.

This Barbara had yet to learn in all its truth, all its fulness. She only knew to-night that she was moved to pass over miles of lane and field as if she were but passing over a few yards. Her imagination saw only the quaint gray old house upon the hill-top at Market Yarburgh.

She stood upon the lawn at last. She had found no bolts or bars to prevent her, and she had made her way up the wide avenue as one not dreaming of any right or title to be there. Instantly she found her way to the front of the house, not knowing it to be the front. There was only a light here and there in the upper windows, but on the lower story there was what seemed to Barbara a very illumination from three of the windows, each of which reached to the ground, and, being uncurtained, disclosed the room within. Bab stood staring awhile, not dazzled so much by the light, not by the strange wonderful beauty, as by the silence, the emptiness of it all. She had not meant to be curious, still less to be a spy upon aught to be seen of the Rectory from without; yet she stood as if spell-bound when once she had discerned that in all this wide magnificence of light, of colour, of beauty, there was no human soul to enjoy. For a time Barbara was bewildered.

At last, as she stood there she saw a door open, far away at the end of the room, and then two ladies entered slowly, gracefully, richly dressed. They came in together, arm-in-arm; the elder lady was bending down toward the younger one, and as they reached the glow of the fire the younger one lifted her face for a kiss—a warm, lovingly-given kiss. Then Bab did not know any more for awhile; but under the evergreen oak opposite to the drawing-room window there was the sound of sobbing, much subdued, yet painful enough had any been there to listen. Barbara was but too sure that no listener was there. All her grief lay in her loneliness.



## CHAPTER XLIII.

IF MUSIC BE THE FOOD OF LOVE, PLAY ON.'

'Trust me, no mere skill of subtle power,  
No mere practice of a dext'rous hand,  
Will suffice without a hidden spirit,  
That we may or may not understand.'

A. A. PROCTER.

BARBARA'S tears had been stayed some time, yet she knelt there under the shadow of the tree, quiet, wondering at herself, yet thinking mainly of others. It was a still, clear night; the stars shone and glittered, the outlines of the trees and of the house were distinct against the deep indigo of the sky. For a time hardly a sound broke the silence, save the hooting of a melancholy owl in a tree at the bottom of the garden. Presently even this ceased, leaving a perfect stillness upon the land everywhere. Not a twig was stirred, not a blade of grass quivered, not a bird moved in its nest with any audible movement. It was a moment when silence itself is a strong impression.

Then all at once that beautiful silence was broken, but broken by a sound so thrilling, so sweet, and to Barbara so strange, that she rose to her feet and stood with clasped hands and uplifted face, as one entranced might have done. What could it be, this beautiful, this ineffably beautiful music?

It may seem strange in these days that Barbara should never have heard the tones of a piano; but so it was. And now that this first experience should come under circumstances so unusual was sufficient to stamp the impression on her mind for ever. She remained standing there for some time; one of the windows of the drawing-room was open; the light from the room was streaming out over the terrace, over the shrubs, over the leafless trees. And somehow the music seemed part of the light, part of all the beauty within and without. Bab had no idea of what the music might be. It seemed like a prayer, like pleading, and confessing, and beseeching. And now there was agitation in the cry, an excitement that seemed to stir the very air. It was as if she was watching a shipwreck, listening to the cry of drowning women, of children left to perish. Half unconsciously she drew nearer to the window; she could see Miss Theyn sitting by the piano, her white hands moving up and down, now slowly and gracefully, now in a quick, impassioned way. Only her profile was visible from where Barbara stood, and Bab could see that she looked pale and sad—sad as the music she was making, which now by degrees was growing sadder than ever, more plaintive, more deeply charged with pain and regret, with loss and trembling and fear. Bab hardly knew that the tears were running down her own face—tears of sympathy, of longing; and when at last a sob broke from her, a passionate, overwhelming sob that was half a cry, she



was startled at least as much as Miss Theyn was, whose fingers stopped suddenly upon the keys in the middle of a soft, sad passage in a Nocturne by Chopin. Bab saw that she had heard, she saw the uplifted, surprised face ; yet she could not move ; she had no wish to move.

'Go on playing, Thorda dear,' said a sleepy voice from among the sofa cushions behind the screen.

'I will begin again presently, Aunt Milicent,' Thorhilda replied calmly as she came near to the window.

She was not altogether unalarmed, yet she would not betray her alarm yet awhile. Opening the window a little wider she looked out, and saw the dark figure upon the terrace, quite close.

'Is it anyone I know ?' she asked in a tone so as not to disturb her aunt.

And instantly the answer came :

'Yes, Miss Theyn, it's me, Barbara Burdas. Will you forgive me ? I never meant to disturb you.'

Thorhilda, discerning the sound of tears in Barbara's voice, would not ask her to enter the drawing-room.

'Wait there awhile, will you ? I want to see you,' she replied.

Then she turned and said a few words to her aunt, who was too sleepy to take a very lively interest in her niece's movements at that moment.

A few seconds later Thorhilda was by Barbara's side, holding her hand, entreating her to come into the house, to her own room ; but Barbara was not easily persuaded to this. At last, however, fearing that Miss Theyn might take cold there on the terrace, she yielded. It was a somewhat memorable moment. For the first time Miss Theyn was conscious of a feeling—was it gratitude for devotion ? was it affection ? was it sympathy ? She hardly knew herself ; but the sense of being drawn to Barbara was certainly there, and the simple, truthful way in which she said, 'I am glad to see you, Barbara,' as she took the girl's hand again, and led her to her own easy-chair by the fireside, was sufficient to make poor Bab's heart rise and swell for very gladness. No words could have told it all.

'I never thought of this—not for a moment,' Bab said, in English almost as pure as Miss Theyn's own.

The very accent was changed, softened, purified ; now and then some inflection stirred Thorhilda strangely, as if it were a disturbing memory. At last she detected the cause of this ; it was the echo of Damian Aldenmede's way of speaking that she heard, and the detection caused the hot colour to flow over her face and neck in a way that was perplexing to Barbara. Had she said aught that had been taken amiss ?

It was a curious hour. Barbara felt the warmth, the softness, the delicate beauty of the room almost as she had felt the music. Did people live thus always ? Was this no rare occasion ? Was the house always thus—filled with light, and warmth, and loveliness



everywhere? The walls of even the landings and staircases seemed almost crowded with pictures; bookcases filled with books seemed to occupy every recess. Lamps hung from the ceiling; white muslin and lace looped back, with rose-pink ribbons floated about the windows of Miss Theyn's room; the toilet-table, with all its belongings, seemed a very miracle of artistic arrangement. Was it kept so always? That was the mystery. A thing might be done for once, but to keep up all this refinement of surrounding seemed almost impossible. Yet Bab did not consciously dwell upon these ideas—they came later. Now she was troubled, and glad, and half ashamed, and half enchanted. Was it possible that Miss Theyn was 'glad to see her'?

'I never thought of this,' she repeated, sitting in Thorhilda's little chair, her rich red-gold hair gleaming in the light of lamp and fire, her deep sad blue eyes shining with a new and happy light.

Miss Theyn, sitting opposite to her, watching her wonderful beauty—really wonderful now in the new softness, the new gentleness, the new refinement that had come upon it—watching her thus, she could not but be amazed; and to listen to the words that fell from the fisher-girl's lips was more amazing still. 'Could love, mere love, do so much?'

'Tell me what you did intend?' Miss Theyn said gently. 'I hope you intended to come and see me. Long ago I asked you.'

'So you did; but I never meant to come—not then. No—nor not now in this way. . . . How shall I tell you the truth? I was tired, tired and lonely, and old Hagar came in so that I could leave the little ones, and all at once I felt as if I *must* come here—as if I must but just look at your house—the home you lived in always, but just outside of it! I had no thought of the distance—none. I wanted to come, to stand for a few minutes, and then go back. But when I heard the music I couldn't go—no, I could not. . . . Do you know, I've never heard music like that before—no, nor never dreamed of none like it. Is it a piano?'

'Yes. . . . You have never heard one?'

'No. . . . There's none on the Forecliff. And I've never been much in the way of goin' to the town. . . . I've heard the band, though—them that has two fiddles and the harp at Danesborough. That is beautiful—but not—not like this. . . . How did you ever learn to play so splendid?'

'I do not play well—not *very* well. I have a friend—Miss Douglas—who can play much better.'

'Oh; is that so? Because I heard him say—Mr. Aldenmede, I mean—I heard him say one day to the Canon—it was when he was paintin' on the Scaur—I heard him say as he'd never heard no playin' like yours—no, none to come near it for—for *expression*—that was what he said. I remember, because I wondered so much what he meant. And the Canon looked pleased, and said he thought so too.'

Thorhilda knew only too well that the crimson glow on her face



was going on deepening and deepening, that the agitation of her heart and mind was visible on every feature of her face, in every muscle of her figure.

'Have you seen Mr. Aldenmede lately?' she said, trying with all her effort to seem calm and self-possessed.

'Yes; I saw him last night, and on Monday night. I see him four nights of every week. Isn't that kind of him, and good? And, oh! how could I ever tell you of all he does and says by way of teaching me, and helping me? You couldn't think of the way he has of reminding me when I don't sound the h's. But that's nothing, he says, to dropping the g's; that hurts his ear ever so much worse, and I'd never known that there was any g's, not to notice them in speaking. But every now and then I forget. Yet all these are little things, not to be named by the side of the greater ones. . . . Oh, how can I ever be grateful enough to one that's done so much for me?'

There was a moment's silence—a painful silence on the one side. At last Miss Theyn spoke, evidently with effort:

'You speak of what Mr. Aldenmede *has done*. Does that mean that his kindness to you is at an end? . . . Is he leaving Ulvstan Bight?'

'Not just yet—at least, I hope not. But he has seemed very uncertain of late, as if he didn't know what he was going to do. . . . And in other ways—I don't know whether you have noticed it—in other ways he seems changed. Don't you think so Miss Theyn?'

Thorhilda sat looking into the fire, smoothing out the hem of her cambric handkerchief, seeming now as calm and cold as before she had seemed agitated.

'I have not seen Mr. Aldenmede, not for some time past,' she said at length, speaking with an almost exaggerated quietness.

She could not say more to Barbara Burdas; she could not say to her, 'I have not seen him since my engagement. Day by day I have expected to see him, to have to listen to his congratulations, but day by day he has spared me; and now, *now* I know what such sparing means!'

Thorhilda could say nothing of all this, nor did she quite recognise that she was speaking to one whose eyes had been opened by sorrow, by pain—the pain of loving and losing. Barbara was as silent, as thoughtful as Miss Theyn herself for awhile.

'I thought you had been seeing him often,' she said at last. 'Perhaps it was that I *hoped* you had. I think that must have been it; that I hoped you'd seen him—seen how much he'd changed of late. I never knew no one turn so desparately sad all of a sudden. It's ever so long now since he touched his picture; he seems to have no heart for paintin'—*there!* painting, I meant to say.'

'Do you always think of Mr. Aldenmede when you speak?' Miss Theyn asked, with a wan, faint smile breaking about her mouth.

'Yes . . . how can I help it, when nearly every word has been caught up by him and set right? . . . There's a few words yet



that's fearfully difficult. I think I'll never know how to use them properly.'

The conversation seemed trifling enough, but within the heart of each speaker some painful emotion was being crushed and hidden. Thorhilda knew more of Barbara's suffering than Barbara dreamed of hers; and now Miss Theyn's sympathy was more open to detect the depth of emotion and pain, her thought more drawn to dwell upon it. Already she was beginning to learn the lessons that sorrow alone can teach.

There had been another long pause, during which Miss Theyn's thought had travelled rapidly, as thought always does travel when it is charged by the finer emotions.

'And now tell me of yourself, Barbara,' she said, speaking gently, and bending forward in the soft firelight till she seemed quite close to the pale, tired girl beside her. 'Tell me of yourself. *You* have told me nothing, and Hartas has told me nothing. He said he had nothing to tell—nothing but disappointment and pain. . . . Can you not tell me how it is?'

Barbara was silent for awhile; then she lifted her wide blue eyes—eyes full of an inexpressible astonishment, an unspeakable sorrow. Did Miss Theyn *yet* understand no more than this?

In her perturbation, Barbara rose to her feet, feeling as if she must be away from this close and narrow atmosphere of misunderstanding. She could not go over all the old ground again now with Miss Theyn. Miss Theyn should not have required it—so it seemed.

'I told your brother how it was,' she said, with dignity 'He understands, if anyone does. I am beginning to think no one can—that no one ever does enter into a life not their own; no, not even to a life lived closest to theirs. But I must go home now, it's late enough. . . .'

'Stay a moment,' Miss Theyn interrupted, leaving the room as she spoke.

Presently she came back with some food on a small tray, which she carried herself, and she insisted that Barbara should eat of it.

Then, to Bab's distress, she heard the sound of carriage-wheels; and Miss Theyn went with her to the door; and the Canon was there; and he was glad—truly glad that his niece should have been so thoughtful.

But while Barbara was being driven rapidly down to the Fore-cliff, Thorhilda Theyn was thinking more rapidly, more seriously than she had ever thought in her life before.

'Was it true, all that Barbara had said, or rather intimated; could it be really true that another—one who had occupied so much of her thought—was really caring, really sorrowing *for* her, for her loss! Alas, that it did not seem impossible! Alas, that she should be drawn to dwell again and again upon the sweetness of another's sorrow!



## CHAPTER XLIV.

**'SO FAREWELL THOU WHOM I HAVE KNOWN TOO LATE.'**

'If thus to look behind is all in vain,  
And all in vain to look to left or right,  
Why face we not our future once again,  
Launching with hardier hearts across the main,  
Straining dim eyes to catch the invisible sight,  
And strong to bear ourselves in patient pain?'

CHRISTINA ROSSETTI.

It was not much more than a week after Barbara's visit to the Rectory. The afternoon was cold and gray and wintry. The Canon had gone to the Bight, saying that he had some forty sick people on his list, and would therefore probably not return till late. Mrs. Godfrey, having a headache, had gone to lie down, and her niece, being all alone, tried various ways of passing the afternoon endurably. She found, however, that she was in no mood for practising, none for writing letters, though there were many that she ought to have written. Within the past three days nearly twenty more wedding presents had arrived—to Mrs. Godfrey's distress no fewer than eight carriage-clocks among them. In a humorous mood the Canon had wound them all, set them agoing, placed them in a row on the top of a cabinet in the drawing-room, where they stood chiming—one sweeter and more silvery in tone than another; yet Thorhilda could not bear to hear them, nor did the idea of stopping them commend itself to her taste. She remembered that one of them had been sent by Lady Diana Haddingley—her Aunt's friend rather than her own—and with the clock had come a long and kindly letter. At the end there was a postscript, meant mainly for Mrs. Godfrey.

Thorhilda had seated herself by the writing-table in the drawing-room; her intentions were of the best. One after another the clocks had chimed the hour of three. There was time enough to write a dozen letters before the post went out at five; but, unfortunately, the topmost letter was Lady Di Haddingley's, and the postscript arrested all Miss Theyn's attention.

'I hear that an old acquaintance of ours—Damian Aldenmede—is somewhere in your neighbourhood,' Lady Di had written. 'A friend—you will remember her—Lady Sarah Channing, declares that he has fallen in love with a fishwife, the mother of four or five children. The Channings have been staying for nearly a week at Danesborough, and Sarah wrote to ask me for your address. . . . Do, if you know anything of Mr. Aldenmede, tell me about him. He was a man I always had the highest admiration for, though I never felt that I understood him, though, perhaps, that was not his fault altogether. It is only like that can understand like, and there is no likeness between him and me. Perhaps I needn't point that out if you have met him. What a fancy it is on his part to take to



painting in that vigorous way! But then he never did things by halves. Sarah says the intimacy between him and the fishwoman began by his painting her, so I suppose she must be pretty. All the same, I hope there's no truth in the rumour. Sarah was always a terrible gossip. Still there is no saying what a man like that will do who has gone through such seas of trouble. And I can easily imagine, now that his first youth has passed, that it is very probable that he may be caught by genuine sympathy, whoever may offer it to him. All the same, I shall be glad to know that I have been misinformed.'

Mrs. Godfrey had read this aloud at breakfast-time, when the letters came in. Thorhilda had listened with burning cheeks, not daring to raise her eyes to her uncle's face. How much he saw, how far he understood, who shall say? Perhaps he could hardly have said all himself. It may be that his thought went the deeper that his prayer became the more earnest. It is certain that the trifling episode did not pass over him lightly.

Now that Thorhilda was alone, that she might read this gossiping postscript in silence, it seemed to have a thousand meanings for her, and some of them were meanings that she did not dare to look into—not closely, not truly. She could not answer Lady Di's letter now; and presently she became aware of the fact that she could answer no other letter. Leaving the room in a very tumult of perturbation, she took the garden-hat that always hung in the hall and went out of doors. It was cooler there, and freer, and fresher. She seemed able to think more truly, more clearly, out there among the leafless trees, that hung sadly and swayed softly, and lent an intensity of impressiveness to the always impressive scene.

For some time Miss Theyn walked there, now quiet and hopeful, now roused and excited, then suddenly depressed. She had almost forgotten the peacefulness that had been hers—not so long ago. For some time she had walked up and down the garden paths, passing from one mood to another; then at last the big iron gates at the bottom of the avenue swung open; she could hear the sharp metallic click of them, and instinctively she recoiled. Percival Meredith had been at the Rectory more than half of the day before. Had he the deficient taste, the imperfect tact, to come again to-day? Miss Theyn knew of no other visitor to be expected.

Her surprise was at least as great as her emotion was deep when she discovered Mr. Aldenmede coming up the avenue, slowly, and with the gait and movement of a man to whom all things were indifferent.

When he saw Miss Theyn he came forward more quickly, raising his hat with an almost eager courtesy. In his worst moments instinct stood for something.

Yet the meeting was not an easy one—how should it be? Yet neither of them dreamed how difficult the parting was to prove.

It was evident to Thorhilda from the first that Damian Aldenmede was not in an ordinary mood. His face was paler, thinner



than usual ; his gray eyes seemed more deeply set ; the lines about his mouth were sterner, colder.

'Is Canon Godfrey at home?' he asked, without much appearance of interest in the answer. 'I will not disturb him for long. I have merely called to say "good-bye."'

Thorhilda understood all, the coldness, the depth of intensity behind this stiffness and rigidity of manner.

'I am sorry,' she replied, using all effort to seem calm, and succeeding beyond her own hope. 'I am sorry, but my uncle is not at home. He will regret much when he knows that he has missed you. . . . Do you leave Ulvstan soon?'

'I go to-morrow.'

'So early!' Thorhilda exclaimed, still endeavouring to keep her voice free from tremor, her manner from all agitation. 'Is it sudden—your determination—or have you been thinking of it for some time?'

'I decided last evening.'

'Oh! . . . Will you come into the drawing-room? My aunt is not quite well, but if I tell her that it is a farewell visit, I am sure she will wish to see you.'

'Thank you ; I would not disturb her on any account. Please give her my kind regards, and tell her of my regret. I should have been glad to see her.'

These stiff civilities should have ended the interview ; but somehow they did not. Thorhilda did not turn away ; Damian did not offer his hand. For a strange moment or two they stood there by the top of the avenue, not looking at each other, not speaking ; hardly breathing.

Thorhilda broke the silence, saying in tones that betrayed the effort she used :

'Perhaps your absence may not be for long. . . . You are not leaving England?'

'I leave England for Italy to-morrow night. . . . When I return, or indeed whether or no I return at all, must remain with the future.'

Again for awhile there was silence ; a silence that would have been the end of the meeting if Damian had not raised his eyes to the beautiful face before him, discerning there much of the hidden pain, the hidden suffering. And as he looked he remembered the words that Barbara Burdas had said to him only the evening before, betraying much more than she knew that she betrayed.

'She's none happy,' Bab had said, 'not happy as she ought to be. Her eyes are full of dread and fear, as if she didn't dare look into the future. And all about her mouth there's the strangest trembling at times, just as if she'd be glad to lay down all her life, all her hope, at somebody's feet, and die there. . . . Oh, don't talk to me about her no more ; she's none happy!'

It was just as Barbara had said in her expressive way. This was just the look he saw on the face of the woman he loved, and had lost.



No, he could not turn away ; not yet, not thus. The past days and nights of suffering seemed to be pouring all their painful energy into the present moment. Strong man though he was, his heart was beating wildly, his brain throbbing fiercely. Was it over—was it possible that it could be over, all the new sweet promise that had seemed to be sent as a kind of aftermath ; a blessing upon the later life of one whose earlier years had been all unblessed save for the benediction of sorrow ? Was it not rather a dream, a delusion, all that he had heard of her engagement, her intended marriage ? Had he indeed heard of these things from any authentic source at all ? The very question seemed perplexing, almost stupefying.

It was the first word, the first question, that was difficult.

‘Is it true—is it all quite true?’ he said, speaking with such evident effort, taking a tone so different to any he had used to her before that she could not but understand.

She endeavoured to reply quietly ; and even in this painful moment the extreme graciousness of her manner, the unaffected truth of her soul, struck him afresh with fresh pain.

‘You are speaking of my engagement?’ she said, raising her grave, gray eyes with all their burden of sadness to his. There was no pretence, no subterfuge.

‘Yes,’ was the brief reply.

‘It is true.’

‘You are going to marry Mr. Meredith?’

‘Yes. . . . I have promised to do so.’

There was no mistaking her tone—the sadness of it, the weariness. He understood as well as if she had knelt at his feet and there poured out all the tale of her confession.

For awhile there was silence. Damian Aldenmede would not wrong himself, his own soul, by so much as one word of congratulation, or anything that could be taken for such. Thorhilda understood. She understood also that no small or mean jealousy was at the root of his silence, his reticence.

A man like that to be jealous of such a one as Percival Meredith ! The mere irony of her own soul as the idea crossed her brain showed her more than she had seen before. Never till now had the wide disparity between the two men been so apparent to her. The hour was full of disclosures.

‘*And it is done !*’ she said to herself, an *aura* passing over her like to that which passes over a human being when he is told that he must presently die from some secret ailment he had barely suspected. *It is done ; it cannot be undone.*’

And Damian Aldenmede also understood.

The pallid lips and cheeks, the pleading look about the wild, sad eyes, the new gentleness where all had been gentle before—all these things told him that she was conscious of mistake, of error.

Now he knew, as he had never dreamed to know, that he himself was not guiltless of her misery.



'I did it for the best—together for the best,' he said to himself as he stood there, staring intently into the depths of a white-edged holly-tree that stood upon the lawn, green, bright, glossy in its wintry beauty. Sparrows were darting in and out, a bold blackbird peered from an upper bough, starlings were whirring all about, from the garden-beds to the unused chimneys.

'I did it all for the best. . . . But I did wrong—a wrong I cannot undo. No; not by so much as a word, a look, may I now, or ever, attempt any undoing. It is with the smallest error as with the deepest sin—it may be repented of, it may be condoned, it may be forgiven—forgiven by God and by man—it cannot be undone. And it is no alleviation of my suffering to know that I do not suffer alone—nay, it is an aggravation rather. . . . What can I hope—that she will forget, that she will be happy?

'Happy! This woman happy with a man like Percival Meredith! Good heavens! What must her ignorance, her innocence be, since she can even have dreamt of it? And they, her guardians, her natural protectors—they must be as ignorant of evil as herself, of all that betrays evil, or they could never have done what I am persuaded they must have done—influenced her towards this marriage.'

They were sauntering about now, from path to path, silently, or all but silently. The remark as to the beauty of this evergreen, the failure of that, was not conversation; something had to be said by way of escape from the awkwardness of perfect silence.

More than once a time of perfect silence came. They were passing quite close by the drawing-room windows at one such moment. Two of the windows were open wide; a sudden simultaneous sound of chiming came with a silvery, musical burst. At the first moment Damian started, fancying he heard some distant peal of bells; but when peal followed peal, he turned to Thorhilda with a question on his every feature. To his surprise, she was not only blushing with a deep scarlet blush, but her eyes were suffused with tears that insisted upon falling. She could not hide them; she could not explain them.

'I must say good-bye,' she said, sobbing painfully, and holding out a tremulous hand. 'Do not come in! I will tell Aunt Milicent—I will say all you could wish. . . . Good-bye—and—and my best wishes.'

She was still weeping, weeping bitterly, unrestrainedly; and when Mr. Aldenmede took her hand in his, and held it warmly, she let it rest there for a moment or two. Nature had her way for that brief while.

It seemed very brief to Damian Aldenmede. All at once some secret spring of strength gave Miss Theyn power to recover herself for the moment. Recollection, sudden shame—but a foretaste of that shame that was to overpower her afterward—these and other things became momentarily helpful.

'Say good-bye,' she urged. 'If you cannot congratulate me, you



can at least wish me well—you can at least hope for me that when we meet again I shall be—be somewhat stronger; that I shall disgrace the dignity of my womanhood less than I have done to-day.'

Mr. Aldenmede replied after a pause.

'I know what you are anticipating,' he said kindly; 'you can see already the hours of anguish, of self-reproach, that will follow this brief moment of weakness. I, too, know something of such hours. Every thinking human being has to know them, to suffer from them. It is only the utterly callous who pass through life able to put aside every pang that comes from the consciousness of error, of mistake. . . . But, believe me, all this will pass—it may be late—I fear it will—yet eventually it will pass, and leave you wondering—not that you were moved so deeply, but that you should have been moved at all!'

'Is that how the future seems to you?'

'It is how I should wish it to appear in your sight.'

Thorhilda bowed her head meekly, sadly, heavily. Life seemed over—all save endurance of living.

It was then, in that moment, that there flashed across her mind the thought of one who, thousands of years before, had sold his birthright; and a few seconds later the words of the truest of our Christian poets passed across her thought:

'We barter life for pottage, sell true bliss  
For wealth or power, for pleasure or renown;  
Thus, Esau-like, our Father's blessing miss,  
Then wash with fruitless tears our faded crown.'

Could it be possible that she had done this—bartered her life, her soul, at four-and-twenty years of age? And for what? 'Good God! for *what*?' she asked in all reverence, as she stood there.

'If I had the strength of soul, the daring of spirit, I would at this moment tell all to Damian Aldenmede,' she continued in the depth of her thought. 'But I have not—how should I have, with the attention of a very world of people fixed upon my marriage—my marriage to Percival Meredith, and that within a month? How could I dare to speak out all that is in me?'

Thought passes swiftly. Only a few seconds had passed since Damian spoke his last kindly word. He was still standing before her, pale, quiet, self-repressed.

'I suppose we *must* part,' he said at last, looking into her eyes once more.

'But we shall meet again,' Thorhilda said, trying to smile, but failing rather miserably. There was something in her face, her expression, that Damian Aldenmede could not bear to see just then.

'We may meet again, we may not; at any rate, we must part *now*,' he said, raising his hat and turning away. 'God bless you!' was the last word that Miss Theyn heard from beyond the white-



edged holly-tree Farther off it was repeated more fervently :  
'May God bless you !'

• • • • •  
The marriage-day was fixed ; it was to be on Tuesday, January 11th.

That Christmas was naturally a busy time. 'Busy, and oh, so happy up at the Rectory !' Miss Douglas declared to friends who were not so fortunate as to be able to come and go at the Rectory when they chose. Miss Douglas was quite able to appreciate her privileges, and all appertaining to them. Moreover, whatever her lips might say, her eyes were not blinded.

Yes ; certainly it was a busy time. Postmen and railway porters thronged the way at times ; so many letters came, so many parcels, that more tables had to be brought down from the upper rooms to hold the still accumulating presents.

Thorhilda did not dare to say that each one was an added pang ; how could she, when almost every day Mrs. Meredith came with her son, each of them kissing the blushing, shrinking bride-elect on either cheek, each of them glad for the many tokens that betrayed such a deep and widespread regard ?

Only one eye saw the true cause of the shrinking ; only one heart understood the meaning of the hot, painful blush. Only one man, comprehending all, feared, and suffered, and prayed in silence.

And his prayer was answered ; but not as he had dreamt and thought it might be.

In this very answer there was to be such a sting, such an agony, as Canon Godfrey had never in his life known.

## CHAPTER XLV.

### *'UNSEEN FINGERS ON THE WALL.'*

'With aching hands and bleeding feet  
We dig and heap, lay stone on stone,  
We bear the burden and the heat  
Of the long day, and wish 'twere done.  
Not till the hours of light return,  
All we have built do we discern.'

MATTHEW ARNOLD.

THOUGH the times were bad, 'very bad indeed,' the fisher-folk of Ulvstan Bight said, yet some curious and not infrequent alleviations came in their way about Christmas-time. It was only natural that the Canon should interest himself largely in the matters of soup and Christmas beef, of blankets and coals ; it was only to be expected that Mrs. Godfrey and her niece should drive down to the Forecliff almost every day with flannel petticoats, with knitted stockings—there were at least some half-dozen old women in the neighbourhood who were kept in full work from January to December of each year executing Mrs. Godfrey's orders for stock-



ings and socks. And then, too, there were the little frocks, made of such ill-smelling brown winsey that the carriage window had to be kept open.

'An hour in the sea-breeze of the Bight will blow all that away,' Mrs. Godfrey said, noticing her niece's absolute faintness and pallor; and then, by way of diversion, drawing her attention to the seemliness of the little garments, which had most of them been made by a clever tiny woman, whom nobody ever called a 'dwarf' because of her perfect proportion.

Miss Birkin had done her best for the children this cold Christmas-time. The little frocks were bright with scarlet braid and blue; the little jackets were warm with red flannel linings; the caps, the comforters, the muffatees, the mittens, the gloves, ah, how bright they all looked! and what pleasure they gave!

The Canon's wife and his niece, driving back to Yarburgh Rectory, the carriage half-filled with empty baskets and bags, should hardly have been silent or depressed.

There was no mystery about all this. But when some large packing-cases began to arrive at Ulvstan, for the most part addressed on the outside to Mr. David Andoe, and found to contain many smaller packages otherwise addressed within, a sense of wonder was developed very rapidly; this largely because, so far, there was no clue to the sender.

Ann Stamper, the landlady of the inn, a poor, ailing, worn-out old woman, who had a little packing-case of comforts especially directed to her, declared that nobody could have sent it save Lord Hermeston, of Hermeston Peel, who had taken shelter in her house one showery day, and had been so affable, so simple, as to win all the old woman's warmest regard for him. But Ann Stamper was not the only one to whom the anonymous presents gave cause for mistake.

Old Hagar Furniss found a waterproof basket at her door one morning, containing tea, and biscuits, and tinned meats of various kinds, with a big round plum-cake of such quality that Hagar declared, with tears in her eyes, that no bride-cake could ever have surpassed it. But this was not all: warm scarlet flannel was there in sufficient quantity to last the old woman her lifetime, with a large eider-down counterpane, a thick rug for her fireside, some soft, warm brown woollen serge for a gown, and finally such a big plaided woollen shawl that the poor old creature declared she could never know what it was to be cold any more.

'Don't tell me,' the old fishwife said, her head trembling more than usual in the depth of this new emotion. 'Don't tell me. I've him—it's the Rector. Don't say it isn't—for there's nobody else, nobody living, as 'ud know so exactly what an old woman like me 'ud want an' crave for, an' sit an' dream of when the fire's dying out of a night, an' ya daren't put a bit more coal on to keep ya from starvin' for the dread o' the next night seeing ye without an ounce o' coal i' the house! . . . No, don't tell me; 'twas him, an' nobody



else. An’ may the good God reward him, for I can’t ; no, I can’t so much as say what it all means to me, leave alone thankin’ him. . . . Mebbe God ’ll thank him some day. There’s something like that i’ St. Mattha’. It’s the Last Daäy, the Judgment Daäy, an’ the King says : “ Acause ya did unto them,” meanin’ the poor, such as me, “ Ah reckon Ah’ll take it as if ya’d done it unto Me Mysel.” ”

Here and there, all over the Bight, there were these pleasant touches of mystery ; and yet, helpful as they were, they could not altogether put a stop to the growing hardness of things—the increasing anxiety. Even in such homes as that of old Ephraim Burdas, that Christmas was a time of dread, of strain, of hand-to-hand fight with each sixpence that had to be sent out for food or ‘fire eldin.’

As a matter of course, Barbara had not been forgotten. Miss Theyn herself had come down one day with a closely-packed bag, which had seemed to the children standing round as if it were never going to be emptied. Toys were there ; chocolates (less tempting, because less known), sweets, paper bags full of toffee—made in the Rectory kitchen ; and then below came the warm, comfortable little articles of dress. But this was not all. Outside a hamper had been left, which Woodward had been told to unfasten, and then to leave it standing under the little porch. Bab saw it there when she went to the door with Miss Theyn.

She had not seen it at the first moment. Ailsie had called her elder sister back entreatingly, only to whisper, in a curiously agitated way for so mere a child :

‘ Ask her to come again, Barbie, will you ? *Do* ask her to come again ! . . . It’s not the goodies. . . . Ah can’t eat ’em ; Stevie can—an’ Zeb, an’ Jack—but Ah noän care for ’em. But *will* you ask her to come again ? . . . She smiles so—doesn’t she, Barbie ? . . . An’ she looks at ya so ! An’ her bonny white hands, and the way she has o’ touching things, oh, Ah do like to see her ! Ask her to come again, Barbie ! ’

But whilst Barbara was putting the child’s request into words, her eye fell upon the hamper, as Miss Theyn saw, enabling her to speak of it in a careless, incidental way.

‘ That is something from the Rectory,’ she said. ‘ I believe it is my aunt’s present to your grandfather.’

But Thorhilda perceived the momentary flush of pain that passed over the girl’s face. Barbara had always been so equal to the household needs, that she could not bear that the truth should be suspected now ; nor was it,—no, nor anything near the truth.

If anyone had approximate dreams, it must have been the sender of the mysterious parcel that Bab found on the doorstep one morning in Christmas-week—not that it was mysterious to her ; and all at once she saw to the bottom of the other mysteries that were happening all about.

Yet, if he chose to do good by stealth, he should not be put to the blush of finding it fame by any word of hers. Doubtless Mr.



Aldenmede had sufficient reasons for wishing to seem a comparatively poor man ; but no man so poor as he chose to appear to be could afford to scatter gifts over a whole village in this prodigal way.

‘No ; I’ll not speak of it—not even to *her*,’ Barbara said, with tears in her eyes, as she stood contemplating the dozen new and tempting books that had been packed so carefully at the bottom of the case, and the pile of bright scarlet merino, evidently meant for Ailsie.

How well she remembered his saying that he always felt grateful to any child who came tripping across his out-door vision in a scarlet frock or a scarlet cloak ! Ailsie should have both before he came again.

Then thought itself seemed to pause. Would Mr. Aldenmede ever come to Ulvstan Bight any more ? With a sigh, Bab admitted to herself that it seemed impossible he should.

He had not been happy for a long time before he went away—not even as happy, as equable as when he first came—and he had seemed a man of sufficiently saddened soul then. And Barbara knew all about the cause of his more recent unhappiness—how could she help but know ?

And each time she saw Miss Theyn she saw more certainly than before that happiness was not *there*—not the happiness that should have been at such a time as this.

Barbara saw no future ; how should she ?

‘I suppose they were engaged before—Mr. Meredith and her. And then Mr. Aldenmede came, and she saw the difference—ay, me ! how could she help ? Why, yon man at Ormston minds me of a peacock most of all ; he shines so, and he struts so, with his beautiful white shirtfront standing out in a bow before him—and him turning round in that slow, stiff way, as if he’d got to move altogether or not at all ; eh me, how *could* one like her ever demean herself to one like him ? an’ his hair turning gray ; and a big bald patch on the top of his crown already ! Eh, how could she ?’

But Barbara was just, and had to remember that Damian Aldenmede’s hair had at least a grayer look than Mr. Meredith’s had.

‘He looks as old, Mr. Aldenmede does, mebbe older—but it’s none the same sort of aging, not at all. Why, when he laughs, he laughs like a boy—an’ the other smiles as if he were ashamed o’ demeaning himself so far.’

Was it strange that just now Barbara Burdas should be drawn to dwell upon Miss Theyn so much ? Does it not often happen, all unknowingly, all unconsciously, that our thoughts, our very dreams, are drawn to those (near to us either by sympathy, or by relationship) who are passing through crises of which we are altogether unaware, or have but the merest suspicion ?

This fisher-girl of the Forecliff could really know nothing of the strife that was deepening day by day in the soul of Thorhilda Theyn.

‘Yet I cannot forget her ; no, not for an hour ! It is strange



how I am always finding myself thinking of her! I wonder has she got any thought of me?

Inevitably Miss Theyn had thought of Barbara Burdas, 'many a time and oft.' How should it not be so?

'She loves Hartas—I know she does. I believe his love is precious to her; yet she will not marry him, lest she should even *seem* to be self-seeking—lest she should even seem to desire to raise herself to a different social level; to desire to find ease, and rest, and comfort, and what would perhaps even appear to her as luxury! Barbara Burdas, fisher-girl as she is, will not even have it thought that she could sell her soul for a mess of pottage. And I . . . I . . .? Good God! what have I done?'

There was no irreverence in Miss Theyn's cry. She covered her face with her hands, and knelt by her bed in all the agony of knowledge of error and mistake—irrevocable mistake.

Every swiftly-passing day and hour increased the irrevocableness. Once there had been a chance. Until others knew, and added the pressure of their knowledge, their congratulations, there had surely been a way of escape. Now there was none; and day by day the yearning grew—the longing to escape by any means. With each fresh wedding present, each new congratulation, each allusion to the coming event, she felt afresh the weight, the dread, it might almost be said the repulsion.

It could not be that things should be thus with his niece and Canon Godfrey have no knowledge. It seemed to him now that he had had suspicion from the first.

He could not ask her of her own feeling. It is strange how sometimes the fact of a deep affection, with all the sympathy, all the nearness that such affection means, will yet act as a barrier between sensitive souls. There are things that it is easier to say to a comparative stranger than to a mother revered and beloved.

Canon Godfrey's eyes once fairly opened, he began to see much that he had been blind to before; and for a brief time he withdrew himself, and lived as much apart from his household as was possible to him. He had a great determination to make.

At last, one Wednesday afternoon—it was the Wednesday in the week before the marriage, which was to take place on the Tuesday following—he asked his niece to go with him for a drive. It was a mild day for January. A gray mist was on all the land, rolling over the brown barren fields, over the leafless hedges, over the sparsely-scattered trees.

'Where would you like to go?' the Canon said, taking his seat beside her in the open carriage.

'Oh, to the Grange!' Thorhilda replied. 'Aunt Averil isn't well, and Rhoda has a cold. We must go and see after them.'

This was not what the Canon had wished, but he yielded; and his yielding was a little fatal from his own point of view. He had no chance of driving along the moorland road above Ormston Magna, of looking down upon the house, the gardens, the wide



lawns, the small but beautiful park, of leading the conversation from these to their owner, and from their owner to the future—his and hers. If the Canon had but known how his niece was desiring it! How she was yearning for help, for strength, for light! That was the worst—all seemed so dark now, so hopeless.

The visit to the Grange was pleasanter than usual. Miss Averil Chalgrove was in her own room, and Thorhilda went up to see her. It was the one pretty room in the house—the only one where there was any true feminine daintiness; and Thorhilda was glad to see even that.

‘I wonder Rhoda is not influenced by your pretty room, Aunt Averil,’ she said, glancing at the elegantly-decorated toilet-table, the silver-mounted pots and bottles, the ivory-backed brushes, the mother-o’-pearl glove-boxes, etc., etc.

It was not easy to see them all, the light being so exceedingly dim. Sunny as the afternoon was, the rose-red blinds were half drawn; the lace curtains closed utterly. It was a most becoming light, however, as Miss Chalgrove knew. She was lying upon a sofa, with a pale-blue dressing-gown, elaborately trimmed with lace and ribbon, robing her from head to foot. A tiny table, with an exquisite little set of cups and saucers, was by her side; and a vase with the loveliest white and yellow roses in it. Roses! yes, and even orange-blossom, as Miss Theyn perceived to her agitation.

‘The room is moderately pretty,’ Miss Chalgrove admitted with a sigh; ‘but you know how it comes to be so. Half my small possessions, nay, far more than half, are birthday or Christmas presents from the Haddingleys. They never forget me. I hear they have not forgotten you. What have they sent you, Thorhilda?’

‘Don’t speak of wedding presents, Aunt Averil, *don’t*; I can’t bear it!’ the girl exclaimed passionately. ‘I came here this afternoon to be free from it all for a while. . . . Please talk of something else—*anything*. What is Hartas doing?’

Miss Chalgrove was so overcome by her niece’s most unusual and most unexpected vehemence that she had to use both vinaigrette and fan before she could recover strength enough to reply.

‘You were always a strange girl,’ she said at last in faint tones. ‘I often think that you have had just a little too much prosperity, that life has come to you just a little too easily. . . . Ah me! if—if only some others might taste of such happiness as yours!’

Thorhilda was silent for a moment. Miss Chalgrove could not see in that dim rose-coloured light how pale, how rigid her niece had grown. But presently she felt her hand grasped warmly in a younger and stronger one, yet the grasp was tremulous.

‘Don’t speak to me of happiness just now, Aunt Averil; do not speak to me of myself at all. Tell me how things are going on here. Uncle Hugh fancied there was improvement.’

‘Improvement, my dear! If you said revolution you would almost be within the mark. Why, only to-day your father and Hartas have gone to Danesborough, to a sale of cattle and farming



things. They have gone together, and for business purposes. Do you know all that that means? I suppose you do not,' Miss Chalgrove concluded, with tears in her eyes.

'And things are really going better?'

'They are promising to go better; that is everything. Hartas is just one of those people who can do nothing by halves; yet I never thought he had in him such a power of work, and of ability to organize work, as he has displayed of late. Of course, I only hear of it all through your father and Rhoda; but they seem as if they could not make enough of him now. . . . It is very strange! Think of a crisis in a man's life making such a change!'

'But remember what a crisis it was!'

'I dare not remember; I cannot, even yet. . . . Why, for nights and nights afterward I awoke screaming, and Rhoda had to come and sit beside me for hours together. Once your father came; and immediately, as soon as he saw me, he sent Burdon off for Dr. Douglas. And all *that* came of my suffering because of his suffering—Hartas's. I had dwelt upon it so, imagined it all so vividly in my own brain, that I never slept without being instantly introduced to scenes of sea-suffering. It was terrible, oh! it was very terrible; but the curious part of it is that ever since that time Hartas has been so much more to me than he was before. I am not myself to-day, because he is not here. I like to know that he is not far away from the Grange; I like him to come to my room and sit for an hour or two at a time; and you would not wonder if you saw him here by my fireside in the twilight. There is such a change! It is not only that he looks paler, thinner, more refined, that he has gentler ways, quieter manners; there is something beyond all that.'

Thorhilda mused for awhile, then she said:

'Don't you think that "something" may be love, Aunt Averil?'

Miss Chalgrove knew what Thorhilda was meaning; but she did not reply in her usual light and crude manner. Even to Miss Chalgrove there was a change in the atmosphere—a change for the better; how much for the better who shall say?

'A little leaven leaveneth the whole.'

'I know of what, or rather of whom you are thinking,' Miss Chalgrove said at last, evidently speaking with some difficulty, and then pausing for a considerable time.

At last, roused by the subject, she spoke with some vehemence.

'It pained me terribly at first,' Miss Chalgrove said. 'How should it not pain me, to think of my nephew, my only nephew, marrying a fisher-girl, a bait-gatherer! The mere idea was repulsive in the extreme.'

'Have you ever seen Barbara Burdas?'

'No; nor do I wish to see her. . . . I am told you have quite taken what people call a "fancy" to her.'

'That is hardly correct. I have been slow, extremely slow, to perceive that she is one of the best, one of the purest, one of the most high-minded women it has ever been my privilege to meet.'



'Really! . . . And very pretty, I suppose?'

'Not pretty at all; at any rate not now. Six months ago she had a sort of pink-and-cream freshness, and certainly her bright blue eyes were very attractive. All that has gone. She is thinner, and she looks faded; and the light has gone from her eyes, except just when some emotion brings it back for a moment. . . . No; of mere prettiness Barbara has little left, I am sorry enough to say it.'

'But all the while you are meaning that she has some stronger and deeper attraction?'

'Yes; that is just what I am thinking, but I cannot explain it. . . . Anyhow, I do not now wonder that one like Hartas should have been drawn to her. . . . I have only seen it lately, but she is his superior in every way!'

'In *every* way? But that is exaggeration surely Think of it, Thorda dear!'

'I have thought of it often. The girl has naturally the "air" of her class. For all her fine independence of spirit, she is yet wanting in self-sufficiency, especially when anyone is present that she cares for; but of this, of all this, one thinks nothing in her presence. She stands there, dignified with a certain moral dignity—my uncle Hugh would say spiritual—and one is even conscious of a kind of inferiority, as if *she* were the superior. It is difficult to explain how, on the one hand, she seems wanting—just a little; how, on the other, she surprises you with an almost overpowering sort of supremacy. You would never dare to utter a silly joke if Barbara Burdas were within hearing.'

'I don't know that I am given to uttering "silly jokes" under any circumstances,' Miss Chalgrove said, evidently, with her usual amusing egotism, having taken part of Miss Theyn's remark in a personal way. 'Yet what you say interests me. I do not doubt but that it is partly her influence that has wrought such a change in Hartas. And what a change it is! He is not the same in any sense of the word. From being the most absolute idler on the face of the earth, he has become one of the most hard-working men I have ever known. And he must have some strong purpose in his brain to induce him to go on working thus. I cannot tell what it is. He has said that he has no hope of inducing the girl to change her mind. One cannot but be glad, very glad; yet the matter is not without interest.'

'No, it is not without interest,' Thorhilda replied, with a certain dreaminess of manner which altogether belied the emotion in her heart.

It seemed as if everywhere the strong, pure influence of a pure love was having a good effect upon others—upon all whom it touched save herself. And what was it meaning to her? She asked the question with apparent sincerity. Yet she dared not look upon the answer.



'I must make answer sometime,' she said, as they went homeward, her uncle silent, absorbed, by her side.

He, too, had seen much in the changes that were happening to make him thoughtful, yet far from unhopeful. Nay, it almost seemed as if his brightest outlook were here. The few moments that Thorhilda had passed upstairs with her valetudinarian aunt the Canon had spent with Rhoda; and he could not but discern the change that had passed over the household. It was visible in the aspect of the room, in Rhoda's look and manner, and speech and appearance.

' Sweet are the uses of adversity,  
Which like the toad, ugly and venomous,  
Wears yet a precious jewel in his head.'

Such were the words that struck Canon Godfrey as he went home to his comfortable-seeming Rectory at Yarburgh; a home that seemed to outsiders as if no cloud might ever overshadow it, no thorn come near any rose within its walls.

All the way the Canon was silent; all the way his niece was wondering if she might make one more effort, one more attempt to confess her mistake, her misery, her dread. Then she remembered that it was Wednesday.

'Uncle Hugh will be thinking over his lecture for this evening,' she said to herself. 'That is why he is so silent, so absorbed. I must not disturb him.'

## CHAPTER XLVI.

### SOME WORDS FROM A WEDNESDAY EVENING LECTURE.

'For this I say is death, and the sole death,  
When a man's loss comes to him from his gain.'

ROBERT BROWNING.

It was not by any means a studied informality that marked the Wednesday evening services at St. Margaret's, yet the Canon had, with some care, decided upon the lines he wished to occupy.

This pre-consideration notwithstanding, he found that experience considerably modified the rules he had laid down. To feel himself face to face with some dozen fishermen and their wives in the dim light of the nave of the old church on a winter's evening was a moment sufficiently realistic to call forth new effort, new sensitiveness to the need of effort. In such hours as these Canon Godfrey felt always that the uttermost was demanded of him—the very best that he was prepared to give.

And, conscientious as he was, often he knew that his preparation had not enabled him to meet the moment and its demand. Again and again he had to kneel at night, crying, 'My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?'

So it is that the saints of God are trained to their saintliness by



the sense of failure, of inadequacy. It is not the man who makes the fair and truthful statement :

‘Lo these many years do I serve Thee, neither transgressed I at any time Thy commandments.’

It is not this man whose career is held out for the encouragement of erring humanity. It is his younger brother, who could only cry, in the agony of conscious abasement :

‘Father, I have sinned against Heaven, and before Thee ;

‘And am no more worthy to be called Thy son . make me as one of Thy hired servants !’

It is this younger son who draws our sympathy, who claims our compassion ; it is here that we feel a true like-mindedness. In the worst moments we have known, has not this same Prodigal Son seemed also as a friend and a brother ?

On this particular winter’s night—it was the fifth of January—Mr. Egerton had taken the service, the Canon remaining in the vestry till the end of it—an altogether unprecedented proceeding on his part.

It was a dull, chill night ; and certainly not twenty people were scattered about in the gloom. The Canon came down the chancel steps slowly, looked about him calmly, sadly, then bowed his head in prayer for a moment or two upon the reading-desk, from whence he always gave his homely lecture. It was nearer to the people than the pulpit was ; and the position seemed to have less of formality about it.

The church was large for the place—large, and old, and gray, and, notwithstanding restoration, somewhat dismal. Canon Godfrey tried always to refrain from seeing who might be present before him, and who absent. But to-night almost every face seemed to be impressed upon his vision in an instant.

Each old fisherman he knew, each old or young fishwife—there might be ten of them altogether. Amongst them was the uplifted, appealing face of Barbara Burdas. And a little nearer to him—only a little, he had caught sight of the face of his niece, Thorhilda.

He had not been sure as to her presence beforehand ; he had hoped for it ; he had let drop a word as to his hope. And she was here.

All alone she sat in a dim corner where the lamp-light did not fall. The old brown oak cast shadows about her ; her dress was dark and unobtrusive ; only her face seemed white—white, and sad, and still.

While the Canon’s head was bowed in prayer, hers was bent too in all reverence. She did not lift her face till the preparatory silence was broken.

The Canon’s voice was lower than usual, sadder, more impressive.

‘As you know, my friends, it is not my usual way to take a text for these Wednesday-evening lectures ; rather have I preferred a *thought*, a quotation from some poet, an idea from some impressive writer. To-night I would go back to the old and time-tried plan ; I would give you a text of the Holy Scripture. This text you will



find either in the pages of St. Matthew, chapter 16th, and verse 26th, or in St. Mark, chapter 8th, verse 37th. . . . There is but little difference :—\*

“What shall a man give in exchange for his soul?”

‘If you turn to the New Version of the Gospels, you will find that the word “soul” is translated “life,” so that the question appears much less impressive :

“What shall a man give in exchange for his life?”

‘For mere physical life men have been drawn to exchange many things—honour, money, faith itself. The life of the body is precious to the most miserable among us. It is a first instinct to fight for it, care for it, protect it ; and that this instinct was thus strongly implanted in us for wise ends who can doubt ? There is even a sacredness—a most solemn sacredness—about the most pitiful human life.

‘What, then, shall we say of the soul—the soul’s life—the life that is to know no ending ? Thought itself seems silenced while we ask the question :

“What shall a man give in exchange for his soul?”

‘I think it possible that some of us may have read this text wrongly ; that we may have understood it as if it were written :

“What shall a man take in exchange for his soul?”

‘It is as if the enemy of souls might offer us a kind of bargain, as doubtless often he does ; saying to this man, “Will you take fame ?” to this, “Will you take riches ?” to this, “Will you take the praise of men ?”

‘To some of us the voice of the tempter may come in tones of far lowlier seeming—he knows precisely where to strike. So to the man weary of strife he will offer peace ; to the woman worn by labour and care he will offer rest ; to the brain tried sorely by responsibility he will offer the means of luxury and ease, the most perfect cessation from all strain, all fear as to the future. It is this complete knowledge that renders him so formidable as an adversary.

‘Yet we are not defenceless. We are put on our guard from the first moment of capacity to distinguish between good and evil.

‘The question is writ large and plain :

“What will you give in exchange for your soul ?”

‘What will you give ?

‘It is a strange thought at first. Is a man’s soul not really his ? Must he buy it ? must he redeem it ? must he give something in exchange for it if it is to be really his own ?

‘The answer is, *Yes !*

‘You must work out your own salvation.

‘Not the smallest thing worth having is to be had for nothing. Everything has its price, and the price is proportioned to the value.

\* Of course no complete sermon is intended here—this is no place for it



What, then, is the value you put upon your soul—the part of you that is to live for ever? It must live for ever. *How* it is to live hereafter you must decide here; this is the only time for decision. And if you fancy that you can defer the moment for deciding, believe me that is a mistake. While you are putting off from day to day, the spiritual laws that rule your spiritual life are deciding for you. The longer you leave your soul's life to chance, the more difficult will you find it to take your rightful position again.

• • • • •

‘Even now, to-night, you are asked—not by me, but by One speaking through me—even now you are asked this question:

“*What will you GIVE in exchange for your soul?*”

‘You must give something—that is the nature of your tenure; and seldom, if ever, is it left to any of us to choose *what* we will give. As a rule something is put before us; something that we know instantly to be a *crux*—a trial of our faith.

‘Daily we must give something; hourly. “Take up your cross *daily* and follow Me,” said the Master, speaking as none had ever spoken before, with a regal commandingness that drew all hearts capable of being drawn. It is so still.

“‘I die daily,” St. Paul declares; and in another place he said, “For we who live are delivered always unto death for Jesus’ sake; that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh.”

‘Everywhere it is put before the Christian that the price he has to pay for his soul's life is a daily death—a death to something more than what the world counts sin.

‘The words may seem harsh, the thought forbidding; so they might be in reality, but for two things: first, the love that constrains us, that is all about us, that is all within us, filling us with warmth, surrounding us with light. This love is the first and greatest thing that turns the true Christian's sorrow into joy.

‘The second thought that should forbid the way of life from seeming a hard way is the certain and cruel hardness of the world's way. Oh, my friends, believe one who has known all too much of what the world has to offer; believe him when he says to you that its best is a hollow and bitter mockery of what you dream, of what you seek!

“*What shall a man give in exchange for his soul?*”

‘Ah, what is it that he accepts? Unrest, wild, maddening unrest, where he had thought peace would be; disappointment where he had dreamed only of fruition, the fullest fruition, of his every hope; pain where he had felt sure of finding joy; sorrow instead of gladness; loneliness on the heights where love was to have met him; humiliation where praise and honour were to have been; thanklessness in the place of gratitude; coldness and unkindness where friendship had held out both hands in token of warmth, and sympathy, and loving-kindness.



‘These are the things we accept in exchange for our soul. All too late we begin to find the truth.

“For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for My sake and the gospel’s, the same shall save it.

“For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?”

‘What shall it profit him? Oh, that we should need to wait for our dying hour to see this—to be able to answer this!

‘Every day the question is asked of us, but to each one of us there comes a special hour of questioning. Sometimes it is early in life, sometimes late; sometimes God in His mercy sends the questioner “Fate” more than once. “Fate,” one will say; “Circumstance,” another. It is the same thing, “the Providence, the forethought of God.”

‘It is God taking care for your soul, for mine.

“Be sure of this,” says a Christian writer yet living, long distinguished for the purity and holiness of his living—“Be sure of this, that if He has any love for you, if He sees aught of good in your soul, *He* will afflict you, if you will not afflict yourselves. He will not let you escape. He has ten thousand ways of purging those whom He has chosen, from the dross and alloy with which the fine gold is defaced. He can bring diseases on you, or can visit you with misfortunes, or take away your friends, or oppress your minds with darkness, or refuse you strength to bear up against pain when it comes upon you. He can inflict on you a lingering and painful death. He can make ‘the bitterness of death’ pass not. We, indeed, cannot decide, in the case of others, when trouble is a punishment, and when not; yet this we know, that all sin brings affliction. We have no means of judging others, but we may judge ourselves. Let us judge ourselves, that we be not judged. Let us afflict ourselves, that God may not afflict us.”

“Let us afflict ourselves.” That is usually the meaning of these times of temptation. We are brought into a strait, asked what we will give to be delivered from it, and given free choice between two answers, often enough, God knows, almost equally painful. Then the result may safely be left to God Himself; a God to Whom we have prayed, confessed, and before Whom we have laid all our straits and helplessness.

‘But more frequently it happens that our Temptation in the Wilderness—the wilderness of this wide, cold, unfriendly world—more frequently it happens that our temptation resembles His. On the one hand there is the offer of bread, of relief from hunger, symbolising deliverance from temporal care. Many of us are acquainted with that form of temptation, and to many of us it is the strongest of all. From the man with a little money, who is told that with that little he may “grow money” if he will but speculate, or gamble with sufficient unscrupulousness, from him to the man who can write a pure book, and is told, over and over again, that if he will but put the same talent or genius into a book more or less impure, all the golden gates will be opened to him henceforth—from the one to the other there is no wide stretch. The temptation is the same.



“You have the stones,” this wily tempter points out. “And you have the power to command these stones to be made bread. Why not? It is a simple matter. The world that looks upon you now coldly, or shyly, or, at best, with hope that some day you may be worthy of its warm patronage, the same world would be at your feet if you did but issue the simple command to the stones before you that they should be made bread.”

‘The second temptation, to spiritual power, comes seldom to ordinary men *in these days*. The time for its predominance has not yet arrived; it is in the distant future, the far future, that this temptation will assail men more frequently, more fiercely. We have not arrived at that time, nor shall we; not any of us who are living now.

“I shall see it, but not now; I shall behold it, but not nigh.”

‘The third temptation, to temporal power, is rife enough; but it does not come so near, so strenuously, to most of us as the first. Yet the two are often combined; then they are strong indeed. Who shall resist them?

\* \* \* \* \*

‘Again the question comes, “What shall a man *give* in exchange for his soul?”

‘Most of us, at any rate many of us, would be ready to say at once:

“Lord, I will follow Thee whithersoever Thou goest.”

‘But ah! almost at the first step we stumble. The stones are hard, the darkness, the loneliness, the need of human sympathy and help make the way all too difficult, and we shrink back disheartened, dismayed, still farther even from being at peace with ourselves.

‘If now, just now in this hour of discouragement we are drawn up to some mountain-top of temptation, left alone there with the tempter, a tempter who offers us all the good things of this world, offering them in precisely the manner to suit our circumstances, our age, or inclination, how shall we escape?

‘How, indeed? . . . First of all there must be a strong and clear sense of what *yielding* will mean; what it must mean here, what hereafter.

‘And if there be any soul here to-night struggling alone on the barren mountain-top of temptation, struggling with the strange, dark form of evil which has been permitted to tempt mankind from the first created human being unto, undoubtedly, the last; if there be any such here to-night, let him think, let him pause, *now* and *here*. In the name of God, I ask any such tempted soul to lay down his soul’s burden before Him who created that soul, and who knew of the burden, who pre-arranged it, *even before the world was*. Think of that; that however keen, and bitter, and deep, and unbearable your trial may seem, your Creator foresaw and arranged it all down to the last detail.



‘He knows what you will do. He knows whether you will stand or fall.

‘It may be that you *have* fallen. If so, the price to be paid in exchange for your soul will be so much the greater.

‘He knows whether you will pay it, or whether you will exchange your soul instead of paying it.

‘Also He knows that He has put every inducement in your way. While *permitting* temptation, as a sole means of spiritual growth and strengthening, He has URGED the way of escape. The New Testament, as the Old, is charged with the appeal, “*Why will ye die?*”

‘And yet we choose death. Thousands of us day by day are choosing death—smiling while we choose. And yet, behind the smile, what tears!

‘Again I will quote from that writer whose words of spiritual helpfulness I used but now :

“It is said that we ought to enjoy this life as the gift of God. Easy circumstances are generally thought a special happiness; it is thought a great point to get rid of annoyance or discomfort of mind and body; it is thought allowable and suitable to make use of all means available for making life pleasant. We desire, and confess we desire, to make time pass agreeably, and to live in the sunshine. All things harsh and austere are carefully put aside. We shrink from the rude lap of earth, and the embrace of the elements, and we build ourselves houses in which the flesh may enjoy its lust, and the eye its pride. We aim at having all things at our will. Cold, and hunger, and hard lodging, and ill-usage, and humble offices, and mean appearance, are all considered serious evils. And thus year follows year, to-morrow as to-day, till we think that this, our artificial life, is our natural state, and must and ever will be. But, O ye sons and daughters of men, what if this fair weather but insure the storm afterwards? What if it be that the nearer you attain to making yourselves as gods on earth now, the greater pain lies before you in time to come, or even (if it must be said) the more certain becomes your ruin when time is at an end? Come down then from your high chambers at this season to avert what else may be.”

• • • • •  
‘There is yet time, yet, even yet, to answer the question, “What will you give in exchange for your soul?”

‘You may yet say, “I do not care to buy my soul. I will give nothing. I will buy my life. I will give one sort of happiness for another sort. I am doing this consciously. But as for my soul, that is a question that at least may be deferred. There is always hope for one’s soul. The thief, dying on the cross, had hope that he might be saved.”

‘So he had. “This hope was given to one man that not one might despair; it was given *but to one*, that none might presume.”

‘But few of us, very, very few are so presumptuous as to reply thus: “No; we will give ourselves to God when this crisis is over, or that.” Not next year, but this; not next month, but this; sometimes not even to-morrow, but to-night; this very night, when we kneel for our last prayer.

‘Then why not now, this hour, this moment? Why not—oh! why not surrender at once?’



The Canon had spoken the latter words tremulously, beseechingly ; with his last cadence his voice had broken pathetically. . . . It was evident that he could say but little more.

The last words he had said were yet lingering on the ear of each listener. The candles were flickering and dying in the tin sconces ; a chill wind was wailing outside, shivering up the wide gray aisles of the church.

Wilder and wilder the wind clamoured round the old gray tower ; dreary and yet more dreary it came wailing up the silent aisle.

Once more Canon Godfrey broke the silence, saying, in low, penetrating, fervid tones :

‘Think of this. I beseech you, think of it—

“*What will you give in exchange for your soul?*”’

Another moment, the moment following this plea, there was silence.

Then a cry rang through the church—a sudden, thrilling, despairing, appalling cry—such as few of those who were listening then had ever heard before. For a moment, a long moment, so it seemed to Canon Godfrey, no one stirred ; no one dared to stir. The Canon himself could not. He bowed his head once again upon the desk, expecting to hear the cry repeated ; but no repetition came ; instead, he heard a low, intense, irrepressible sobbing.

Did those few uncultured people understand ? One by one, they left the place. Mr. Egerton went to the dim corner, where a figure knelt in a very agony of mental pain, not even yet to be subdued by any mere effort of will.

Mr. Egerton did the best thing he could do. He knelt by the sobbing, suffering woman ; awhile he knelt in silence, then in an audible whisper he prayed. And his prayer brought help and strength.

‘I will go home with you, Miss Theyn, if you will permit me,’ he said at last. ‘The Canon will follow. I do not think he will go to the Rectory for some time yet.’

Mr. Egerton’s surmise was correct. Till long past midnight the Rector of Market Yarburch knelt and prayed in the chancel of the church he loved so well. In a very agony of prayer he knelt, and his prayer was for the most part a prayer of intercession. That prayer may not be written on this page. It is written elsewhere—in the book that is open before the Great White Throne.

## CHAPTER XLVII.

### IN THE DEAD OF THE NIGHT.

‘God answers sharp and sudden on some prayers,  
And thrusts the thing we have prayed for in our face,  
A Gauntlet with a gift in it.’

E. B. BROWNING.

NOT a moment—not one moment might be given to deliberation.  
Thought would undo all.



'I have thought too much,' Thorhilda Theyn said to herself. 'Now I must act.'

Endure long as we may, long as we can, if at any time we determine to cease from endurance, there is always a determining cause. As a rule this cause comes suddenly; as a rule it is a trifling one; *very* trifling if compared with our months or years of suffering.

The working-man who strikes his wife—perhaps half murders her—and so brings himself into public disgrace for the remainder of his life, because his dinner was not ready at the time he needed it, may perhaps not have known for years past what it was to have a meal decently cooked, and ready in time. All his years of patience go for nothing in a moment, so far as the world is concerned. In a dim and dumb way he *may* thank God in his prison-cell that there is another world, but he is not very likely to know much of thankfulness of any kind, any more than his wife will know of remorse or of repentance.

No, the remorse must be all his, who forgot himself after long years of patient endurance; and largely the feeling is born of what he knows the world to be feeling toward him. He had a trifling grievance to bear *for once*, and he struck a helpless and defenceless woman. Such is he in the eyes of the little world all about him.

It is a typical case; there are thousands such—thousands that would show how one moment will undo all that years have done.

Such a moment had come to Miss Theyn, of all people one the most ill-adapted to bearing it. That cry in the church—that piercing, bitter, betraying cry—had undone all. She did not once think of it—not with anything like deliberate thought—yet her very brain seemed on fire with the sound of it. Think of it! She was possessed by it. All the world—all the little world about her—would know to-morrow. They would know of her scream, how it had pierced her through and through till she could bear no more.

All round her room there were preparations for the following Tuesday—the day that was to have been the wedding-day. Her wedding-gown hung in the wardrobe—a rich, lustrous dress of white silk, and lace, and ribbons, and flowers. Her bridal veil, with its wreath of orange-blossoms, lay carefully folded by her aunt's own hands in the drawer below, folded and covered with white tissue paper, that it might not be seen or touched any more till the eventful morning. On the dressing-table was the box which Percival Meredith had brought only the day before for her acceptance. It contained a necklace of family jewels, diamonds, and pearls, which he had had reset for her. They were very beautiful; she had admired them; she had put the necklace round her throat for her aunt Milicent to see whether it fitted well, and she had felt a momentary pleasure in them. Now the mere outside of the case was an added pang.

Close to it was another case, containing the four lockets, the four bracelets for her bridesmaids. These had been brought for her in



spection only. They were Percival's presents—loquets and bracelets of gold, with a monogram on each in pearls and turquoise. What would Gertrude Douglas say? What would Maura, and Helaine, and Clarimond Thelton think? These were the four girls she had herself asked to stand beside her at the altar next Tuesday—less than a week hence. What would it be possible for them to think or say?

On reaching the Rectory, Miss Theyn had dismissed Mr. Egerton, not ungratefully.

'I know *now* that you have seen, have understood all,' she said, yet in a state of extreme nervous agitation, as he perceived; 'but do not think too hardly of me. Try to think the best you can, will you?'

'I hope I am not given to thinking hard things of anyone. If I tried I should never be able to think other than kindly of you. . . . But—may I say it? may I speak as if I were your brother?—will you not reconsider, *even now*? Such things have been done before to-day.'

Thorhilda held out her hand. 'Thank you! Good-night! good-bye! Again I thank you!'

Going indoors, she had sent a message to her aunt, simply saying that she was not quite well and would go to her own room.

Mrs. Godfrey had no suspicion; she sat reading, waiting for her husband's return, and finding he did not come, she supposed that he had been sent for to see some sick person. That happened so often that she was quite accustomed to it. 'I will go to bed,' she said to herself at last, 'but I must see how Thorda is first.'

Thorhilda's door was unfastened. Mrs. Godfrey tapped, and then went in as usual. Even now there was nothing to arouse question. The room looked as it had done for some weeks past—a little crowded, a little disarranged. Her niece was not in bed.

'How is this, dear?' she said, going round to the sofa, where a pale figure sat, with clasped rigid hands, white set face, and eyes that seemed to burn in their brilliance. 'How is this? I thought you had gone to bed long ago, and I would not disturb you. What is it? The old enemy—a bad headache?'

'My head does ache, I think.'

'Be thankful, darling, that it isn't your heart that aches,' Mrs. Godfrey answered, certainly not meaning to be unkind, and not dreaming that she could be unperceptive.

To Thorda the speech was as if someone had cast a stone at her. For one moment—one wildly agitating moment—she had had an impulse to throw herself at her aunt's feet, to confess all, beseech her aid; but a second glance at the tall, stately figure, at the beautiful, undisturbed, unperceptive face, the blue eyes that could change and look cold and surprised, even angry—this second glance made the suffering girl shudder to think of her impulse, and the consternation that would have been had she obeyed it. Besides, here was the strong conviction that no good could come of any



such betrayal. 'I should have been over-persuaded. . . . All chance of escape would have been at an end.'

'Do go to bed, dear,' Mrs. Godfrey urged. 'You are looking quite worn. This will never do, and the 11th so near! By the way, have you seen the parcel that came to-night? It came whilst you were at church. No? I fancy it is from Lady Margaret; it is certainly like her handwriting. I should not wonder if it is another silver tray—it looked like that. What a pity it is that so many of your presents are duplicates!'

Thorhilda did not reply; she felt her heart hardening under this unseeing gentleness of speech and manner. One word,—one understanding word—and that night's work—that sad night's work—had never been done.

But the word was not said. Mrs. Godfrey went away, offering to send tea, sal-volatile, wine and hot water; but these were not the things her niece was needing. With a warm, loving kiss, a word of benediction that seemed to have no blessing in it, Mrs. Godfrey parted from her niece. For a long while Thorhilda sat by the fire in silence. Thought itself was silent—she dared not think.

Some time after midnight she heard her uncle opening the door of his study. Her heart beat the quicker for the sound. No shadow of resentment crossed her mind—nay, rather did she feel sorrow, regret for the pain she knew she had caused to him. His intention had been of the best. He had been moved to speak thus by his conscience; by the highest and holiest influences acting upon his sensitive soul. And he could not have dreamed of any such result as that which had actually happened.

What *had* he dreamed of?

Had Miss Theyn once asked herself this question, once tried in solitude and quietness of soul to answer it, she must have been impelled to a mood different from that which was dominating her now.

One idea had entered into her soul, taken complete and absorbing possession of it, as she left the church; and nothing since had shaken it, or lessened its persistent weight.

There was only one way of escape, only one; and this she must follow.

'What shall a man give in exchange for his soul?'

All night the words rang in her ears: while she sat watching the flickering blaze of the fire; while she knelt by her bedside, in dumb, wordless prayer; while she paced to and fro across her room; ever and again between the wailing of the winter wind there came the words, coming like a cry, a plea:

'What will you give in exchange for your soul?'

And now her answer was ready.

'I will give *all*.

'I will sacrifice this prospect that has seemed so much to me; and in doing so *now* I must pay the price for the sin of indulging in it so often; the sin of yielding to a temptation that I knew—



that all the while I knew to be a temptation—tempting me from the right—and for what? . . . For these?’ she said, looking round upon the costly jewellery, the splendid dress. ‘Was it possible that I could be so drawn away for these?’

No; in a calm moment she was constrained to admit that it was not mere finery, not mere luxury, that had been her temptation. There had been many things beyond, a multiplicity of ideas merging in one. There had been the dread of an uncertain future: with the sight of Garlaff Grange and its unlovely, unseemly poverty on the one hand; of Ormston Magna and all its graceful and artistic ease on the other.

‘I was tempted, and I fell.’

That was all she could say now. ‘I have been tempted, and I have fallen; but I will fall no farther. There is one way of escape, only one, and that one, agonizing though it be, I will take. . . I must take it . . . There is no other way.’

All these things were said as one speaking in a kind of trance might have spoken. That moment in the church had marked a certain amount of disorganization of the brain.

A discerning man, a psychologist as well as a physiologist, said some time ago that from the first betrayal of temper on the part of a wayward girl to the last raving of the mad in the cell of a lunatic asylum there is no break, no missing link in the chain of aberration. This is not understood as it ought to be. There is only One who understands.

We blame this man for this divergence from what we conceive to be right; that woman for that; while all the while, what know we?

When Christ forgave the woman taken in sin, brought before Him by vehement accusers, doubtless these same accusers were startled

‘I do not condemn thee. Go, and sin no more.’

So He spake; but there was none left to hear this conclusion. Self-condemned they had gone out from His pure Presence.

They had perceived that He understood; that not only His compassion, but His comprehension, passed far beyond theirs. They were silenced.

One cannot help somewhat envying that sinful woman. Her sin was *understood*; and it was not condemned.

‘We, even *we*, pardon all that we comprehend,’ says the old French proverb; and, ah, the truth of it!

We comprehend so little. We see the sin, but not the temptation. We witness the fall, but not the oft-repeated, and greatly-prolonged strife which has preceded the fatal moment.

It was Thorhilda Theyn’s misfortune that in this hour of her deepest trial she had no friend to whom she could turn in all her weakness, all her despair, all her sense of wrong-doing, and say, ‘Forgive me, save me; help me to save myself!’



Only one thing she had strength to resolve upon : she would sin no farther, not in the same direction. If the idea she was now resolved to carry out was also a sin, surely it were a more venial one, surely it were more easily forgiven, since it involved such desperate pain.

So the night passed, not in thought, not in prayer, but in a dull mechanical semblance of each.

It was some hours past midnight when at last she sat down by her writing-table.

‘I must at least say “good-bye,” dear Aunt Milicent,’ she began. ‘And I must ask you to forgive me. This will seem like terrible ingratitude for all that you have been to me. I dare not think of it, of all that I know you will suffer. Yet no one can blame you. As for dear Uncle Hugh, I must not let myself think of him. Yet *it is his doing. He has saved me.* It is his word that has helped me, given me back the power to see things in their true light. . . . And there was no other way of escape but this—at least I cannot see any other. How could I remain here with that day, that dread day so near, and refuse to keep my promise? All the world about me would have thought me mad. I had no excuse for further delay, not one ; and as for breaking off the engagement *now*, when all is ready down to the ordering of the last dish for the breakfast, and yet remaining here, you will see for yourself how impossible *that* would have been. No ; I have no resource but this. . . . I cannot write of it. . . . I can write no more of anything. My brain is strangely tortured. *It does not seem my own*, but someone else’s brain—one that I cannot understand. Yet it seems that I must obey its dictates, write what it bids me write, do what it bids me do. . . . Again I entreat you to forgive me, and if you can, forget me. Dear Aunt Milicent, I never loved you more than I do at this moment, believing that I shall never see you again. How good you have been to me ! how kind ! Will anyone ever care for me again ?’

This was her weakest moment. Her hand trembled so that the words were nearly illegible ; yet no tears came, no sobs. She sat on, listening to the wind as it wailed round the house, tossing the trees close to her window, moaning in the casement. Then came a soft sudden dashing as of snow upon the window-pane ; yet she hardly heard it, or, hearing, did not recognise.

So the night went on ; passed in an agony so intense as to be most mercifully benumbing.

When or how any purpose shaped itself in her mind she could not afterward recall. She had no remembrance of ever having looked into that future that was not terrible, only because it was not visible.

She had sinned ; and after sin punishment was sure to follow. ‘Be sure your sin will find you out.’ Not, ‘Be sure your sin will be found out.’ Sin often is not ‘found out’ of others ; but it finds one’s self ; and shows no mercy in the finding.

But not even yet was the sense of wrong-doing Thorhilda Theyn’s



worst trouble. Full knowledge, full consciousness, could only come with the return of the fuller tide of life. The hour for the utterance of the exceeding bitter cry of a perfect repentance had not yet struck.

And now the night was almost gone ; there was a faint light showing through the curtains when Miss Theyn once more took up her pen to add a final word.

“Again “good-bye,” again I ask you to forgive me. If I knew aught of my future I should think it best *for you* that I should keep silence. If you know nothing people cannot torture you to confide in them. (I am not meaning anyone in particular.) But I could not tell you if I would, for I know nothing myself. I know nothing but that I am leaving the happiest home that ever anyone had.

‘Dear Uncle Hugh, what it is to leave you ! to go out into an unknown world ! . . . I dare not think ! . . . Once more “good-bye.” You can yet pray for your unhappy

‘THORDA.’

• • • • •  
About half an hour later a figure in a gray cloak and closely fitting bonnet and veil passed out from the front-door of Yarburgh Rectory into a world of such wild whitening beauty as is seldom seen. Every tree in the garden stood in radiant white, each tiny branch with each of its curves fully developed against the deep indigo of the snow-laden sky beyond. The flakes were falling slowly, sadly ; the wind wailing less wildly and wearily ; yet it was a chilling wind, and swept through the very heart of the carefully nurtured girl who strove even in that hour of abandonment not to betray herself to herself by yielding to mere physical weakness.

‘Life can no more be what life has been,’ she said to herself. ‘I must learn to strive, to endure.’

So saying, she came to the big iron gates. It was a difficult matter to open them, to pass out, with snow under her feet, snow and wind driving overhead. And just then a sudden squall arose, seeming as if it swept upward from the great gray sea that lay darkling under the stormy snow-cloud. Wildly and more wildly it swept through the leafless trees ; the accumulated snow came down in avalanches upon the slight gray figure that struggled onward with such bravery as might belong to a broken heart. In that hour life itself seemed over. All that could remain, at the best, would be endurance. Why live, only to endure ? Surely there was a limit to human suffering !

‘I would be content to die, nay, glad to die,’ she said to herself, still striving with the bitter wind and the driving snow. ‘Strong men have died thus, beaten to their death by merciless storms. Why cannot I die ? I should be so glad, so very glad to lie down under the nearest hedgerow, and so “swoon on to death.”’

Yet she strove onward ; some principle and instinct of life within her urging her to strive.



So striving, the dawn-light slowly growing, the cruel storm increasing, she passed on, on beyond Yarburgh ; far above the Bight of Ulvstan where the white water was breaking upon the scaur. Still onward she strove, and whither she went, none knew.

## CHAPTER XLVIII.

## THE DAY THAT CAME AFTER.

'Tis when we suffer gentlest thoughts  
Within the bosom spring.'

FABER.

It was a wild tempestuous morning. The snow swept past the window-pane, the outside world was blotted from sight, the trees were snow-laden to the smallest branch ; and yet the flakes kept on falling, now wildly, now madly ; now gently and softly. Looking upward, all was gray, and dim, and formless : looking below, all was white, and soft, and lovely and entrancing.

'One is almost glad to see it, for a change,' Canon Godfrey said, rubbing his chill hands one over the other. For nearly an hour, he had been reading in a fireless room. 'Yet how carelessly one says that !' he added presently. 'One does not think, at first, of all that frost and snow must mean down in the Bight. . . . God help them all ! How good they are, for the most part ; how brave, how patient !'

Still the big white flakes came whirling down, hiding the white-edged holly-tree : the tall cedar beyond, the dark Scotch firs that yet retained their picturesque form. Indoors all was perfect in the way of contrast. A large coal fire blazed vigorously ; the lamp burned under the coffee-pot, warm dishes were appearing one after another upon the table—muffins, toast, eggs, grilled chicken.

'Why doesn't Thorda come ?' the Canon said at last, not speaking with quite his usual easiness. His remembrance of the night before was still too strong upon him for ease.

'We will not wait, Hugh dear,' Mrs. Godfrey said.

She was not angry, not displeased ; yet in no way was she touched to any unwonted forbearance.

'But it is not usual for her to be late !' her husband urged.

'All the more reason why we should give her a little grace when it does happen,' Mrs. Godfrey replied lightly.

She spoke quite lightly and carelessly, and breakfast was begun and ended without further remonstrance on the part of Canon Godfrey ; but when he rose from the table he sent a message to his niece. Her aunt desired to know whether she was well enough to come down, or whether she preferred to have breakfast in her own room. Quite thinkingly he sent the message in his wife's name. He had not now to discern that there was some little rift within the lute that once had made only such sweet and pleasant music.



He felt a strong wish to see his niece again before going back to his study, to judge for himself as to how the distressing occurrence of the previous evening had added to the unhappiness he feared she had had before. He had not mentioned that sad moment to his wife, and since she had not mentioned it to him, he knew that Thorhilda had not cared to seek her aunt's sympathy. He understood his niece's reluctance to meet him; and he knew that it would be better they should meet at once, and in the presence of a third person. He was sorry that she had not come down as usual. It is always best and easiest to take no outward notice of an awkward moment. The inner soul is stronger for the external reticence.

It was Ellerton who had taken the Canon's message to Martha, the girl who waited upon Miss Theyn. It was Martha's answer that Ellerton brought.

The man entered the room, and stood for awhile by the side-board with a strange look on his face.

'Well!' the Canon exclaimed, in an almost amused surprise.

He was not accustomed to see the somewhat loquacious Ellerton pale and speechless.

'She's not there, sir—Miss Theyn; she's not there!' the man said at last.

'Not where? . . . Where have you been? What's the matter with you?' was the impatient questioning.

'Martha went upstairs, sir—she went to Miss Theyn's room! . . . And the bed! . . . It haven't been slept in, sir!'

A few seconds later Canon Godfrey himself stood gazing upon the bed where his niece should have slept. His wife was close beside him; with pallid faces they looked upon each other, and had no strength to speak.

They entered farther into the room, looked round upon the dainty, feminine arrangements. Some of the wedding presents were there; the case containing the diamond necklace had been left half-open; the locket and bracelets for the bridesmaids were in their cream-coloured velvet tray. The door of the wardrobe had been left open; the glitter of the white dress showed in the gray light; a spray of orange-blossoms festooning some tulle was visible. A rose-coloured dressing-gown was lying over a chair in front of the long-dead fire; a pair of tiny woollen slippers were set up against the fender; a prayer-book lay open upon the white coverlet of the bed.

It was the Canon who saw Thorhilda's letter lying upon the writing-table. It was addressed to his wife; yet he knew that he should be sparing her if he opened it and read it. Quite calmly he read on from the first plea to the last, from the first confession to the last betrayal.

'Dear Uncle Hugh, forgive me! What it is to leave you, to go out into an unknown world! . . . I dare not think!'

Canon Godfrey read a part of the letter to his wife; she begged



to be allowed to see it, to read it herself ; but this he would not permit.

‘There is nothing in it you *need* to know, dear ; trust me for that, can you not ?’

‘Trust *you* ! There is no one, no one else in all the world I *can* trust,’ she said with tearful eyes and trembling, hardly restrained lips. ‘But Hugh, my darling Hugh, you will bring Thorda back ? You will not let her go ? . . . We will persuade her, we will persuade *him* ; there may be delay ; there must, I fear, be pain and even exposure. But it will come right in the end. Say that it will ! She cannot—she *cannot* be meaning now, at this eleventh hour, to say that she will not marry Percival !’

The Canon sighed. Would his wife *never* understand ? Within himself, and unknown to himself, he dreaded the labour of trying to bring about a full and clear comprehension. And in truth it was a difficult task. When all was done that might be done, all said that might be said, Mrs. Godfrey was still irrational, unconvinced, more or less hopeful. The Canon could only sigh and turn away.

‘What are you going to do, Hugh dear ?’ she asked plaintively. ‘What *can* you do ? You have no clue ?’

‘None whatever so far, not the very slightest. . . . I am going up to—to *her* room again, to see if I can find any. . . . No, dear, I would rather go alone. . . . Excuse me. You are not equal to going again to that room yet.’

Mrs. Godfrey was not unwilling to rest her aching head upon the cushions of her sofa. Meanwhile the Canon was moving about a dainty upper room, moving reverently, slowly, as he might have gone about some altar-place. At last he came upon a letter-case, and within it there was the rough draft of a letter—whether it had ever been rightly written and sent he could not tell. There was no indication, nor was there any superscription ; it was only by internal evidence that he judged it to have been intended for a lady whom he knew to be living near London, a lady whom Thorhilda had only seen once for a few days in her early girlhood, and of whom she could have known but very little except from hearsay. Was it *possible* that she could have taken refuge with so mere a stranger ? Was it *possible* that she could have turned from a heart that lived and beat—humanly speaking—so truly for her, for her purest happiness, her highest good, to find shelter, sympathy, in a home all unknown to her—was this really within the bounds of possibility ? Almost for the first time in his life a deadly faintness overcame Canon Godfrey as he sat down upon the sofa his niece had occupied so lately, and a strange unconsciousness passed upon him. Not till long afterwards did he know what that unconsciousness meant. When he did know, those about him said, ‘Too late ! too late !’ Within himself there was joy, because he could say, ‘So soon !’



## CHAPTER XLIX.

'CAN YOU NOT BRING AGAIN MY BLESSED YESTERDAY?'

'And shame gives back what nothing else can give,  
Man to himself—then sets him up on high.'

CHRISTINA ROSSETTI.

HAVING that slight clue gathered from the rough draft of a letter, Canon Godfrey was spared the pain and mistake of making inquiries in the immediate neighbourhood of Yarburgh Rectory. Yet he had enough of pain before him. He was quite calm. Five minutes alone in prayer had been sufficient to ensure for him hours of calmness. His first step was to ride over to Danesborough, send off a telegram or two, and arrange with a clerical friend there to take his place if he should be absent on the following Sunday. His next duty, to go over to Ormston Magna and explain all before the tongue of gossip had had time to tell the sad story, was an unutterably painful one. Yet he seemed to see beforehand precisely how Percival Meredith would receive his news. There would be no cry of despair, no expression of unspeakable agony. And in thus thinking he was not mistaken. Naturally, the Merediths were surprised to see him. It was yet quite early; and the pallor, the stillness of his face was like a warning.

'Don't say that anybody at the Rectory is ill!' Mrs. Meredith cried, putting up her two pretty white hands as if she would ward off any evil news.

'Ill!' the Canon replied, with no answer to his interlocutor's half-smile on his grave face. 'If it were a question of mere illness I think I could bear to speak. . . . As it is. . . .'

'Whatever it is, tell us—*tell us at once!*' Mrs. Meredith cried impatiently, glancing at her son, who stood with a philosophic smile on his lip, turning a broad gold ring that was upon his finger with a certain meaning in the action.

There was no alarm upon his face, no anxiety. For very surprise the Canon could not speak.

'And I thought myself prepared,' he was saying to himself. Mrs. Meredith's attitude was very different.

'For heaven's sake speak, Canon Godfrey—say what you have come to say!' she urged. 'I feel sure it is something dreadful; and I cannot bear suspense.'

'Pardon me,' Hugh Godfrey replied, lifting his sad eyes, turning his tense white face. 'Do forgive me. It is as you say, something very terrible I have to disclose. . . . I can find no words. It is my niece—Thorhilda, who was to have been your son's wife within the week. . . . It seems she . . . she could not bear the thought of marriage now that it came so near. . . . And she has . . . she has gone away; she left the Rectory this morning. . . . My wife hardly realizes it, I think.'

Mrs. Meredith's laugh, a long, low, soft, unbelieving laugh, made



Canon Godfrey shudder. The smile on the son's face was worse than the mother's laughter. Percival Meredith was the one to break the silence.

'What a pretty comedy you have arranged!' he remarked in the smoothest of tones. 'I am only sorry that you have given me the part of "fool" to play.'

Canon Godfrey could only turn in silent misery to Mrs. Meredith. His fine face was not discomfited by the sneer that was upon her lips.

'Would you ask us—would you even wish us to believe that you do not know where they have gone—the happy and interesting pair?'

'Who are you alluding to?' the Canon asked in sudden fierceness, and with most unusual lack of grammatical precision.

Mrs. Meredith was equal to the moment.

'I am not *alluding* to anyone. I am speaking of your pet niece, Miss Theyn, and her *fortunate* lover, Damian Aldenmede, a wandering artist, a penniless adventurer, who is doubtless at this moment congratulating himself on his good luck.'

Canon Godfrey had no alternative but to sit down in the chair nearest to him; and again that strange, appalling sense of powerlessness came over him, and he knew himself to be in the grasp of a power against which he could offer no resistance.

'How many times must one die before death comes?' was the silent cry of the much-tried heart within the man.

For some time he was silent. Then he rose to his feet, himself again, a Christian, and a gentleman, therefore considerate of those to whom it had been his duty to bring a painful disclosure.

'I will forget what you have said, Mrs. Meredith; I can do that—not easily, but I can do it, knowing what I must know of your—your annoyance!'

'That is the exact word,' the lady replied proudly. 'I am annoyed—my son is annoyed—how should we be otherwise? We shall be a laughing-stock for the Three Ridings! But be assured that we shall recover; it is not impossible that we may live to be grateful for what has happened.'

For some time longer the Canon stood there, feeling it a mere matter of duty to endure the last scornful sentence, the final bitter word. Percival Meredith's smiling and supercilious silence was as difficult to bear as anything his mother could say.

The Canon took his leave at last. His gray-white face—the look of hidden suffering written there—made no impression upon those who watched him as he departed. To either of them it was but an hypocrisy the more.

They were able to comfort each other—the mother and son; and before half the day was over to assure each other that all was for the best. And as for the gossip, the amusement—well, they were above it, apart from it. It would not come near them, and they need not go to seek it.



‘We can afford it, Percy; we can afford even this!’ Mrs. Meredith said with a satirical pride not made too evident. ‘We must let no one see that Miss Theyn’s elopement causes us anything but a very mitigated regret.’

And, indeed, there was nothing else to be seen. If Percival Meredith did imagine once or twice for a few moments that he suffered deeper, truer grief, it was not necessary on that account that any compassion should be wasted upon him. His strength was equal to his grief.

As a matter of course, within four-and-twenty hours the news had spread everywhere; with the usual exaggerations and additions, more than one of which might have been traced to Ormston Magna.

It is only fair to say that no one who had really known either Thorhilda Theyn or Damian Aldenmede dreamt that there could be the slightest grain of truth in the rumour that included these two names in one hateful lie.

When it was repeated to Barbara Burdas, the woman who uttered it had reason for wishing that the gift of reticence had been hers. Barbara was silent for a moment; the hot, rapid colour spread over her face and neck; a strange sudden light flashed from her eyes.

‘Are they daring to say that? and of *her*, of *him*?’ she exclaimed in a very passion of earnestness. ‘Good heavens, what a world this is! Is there ever a good man or woman in it that escapes slander and lying? Is there one? To think that any human lips could dare to utter a lie like that!’

Later, Barbara seemed to understand how it had been with Miss Theyn at the last. It did not seem like any lightning flash of comprehension that came to her, but just a gradual development of natural light.

‘She could do no other,’ Bab declared, that light still flashing in her eyes, a flash coming again upon her olive-tinted cheek. It was night now, the world about her was all asleep. But the little Ildy was not well, and needed that Bab should walk up and down the cottage floor with her till long past midnight. Barbara was all patience, all kindness for the suffering baby; but yet to-night her burning thought was of the tale she had been told.

‘She could do no other than she has done,’ Bab said to herself. ‘They’d surrounded her, overpowered her, and she had yielded. Then she saw what she had done, and knew there was only one way out of it. And that way she has taken, never heeding what the end may be! And as for *him*, Mr. Aldenmede, him that went beyond the seas ever so long ago, he’ll never know. Perhaps it’s better so. He can never know the wickedness a wicked world can invent. . . . But, oh! was there nobody to spend their inventions on but *her* and him, two of the best and purest that ever lived? Was there none but *them*?’

While Barbara was spending her indignation thus, the gossips of



the Bight, and far beyond the Bight, were finding sufficient food for the slander they revelled in. There is no need to write here the low taunts, the spiteful accusations of hypocrisy. It is sufficient to say that perhaps no man or woman, upon whose lips the slander dwelt, would not have grieved, and bitterly, compassionately, had they been able to enter into the heart of the suffering Thorhilda Theyn was enduring even while they spoke.

‘*The sacrifice of God is a broken spirit.*’

To how many thousands have these words given comfort! To how many thousands have they seemed as if specially written for them!

‘*A broken spirit!*’ To have nothing left but that; nothing, in all the world nothing, but a heart, a spirit broken with the sense of its own sin, its own error, its own mistake, its own life-long shortcoming, and to know that even that seemingly-wrecked soul may be accepted of God! Oh, where shall one find words wherewith to recognise, but ever so feebly, that magnificent mercy!

When all is done, all lost—when hope itself lies dead in the heart, to know that even then this broken and contrite spirit will be accepted of Him who sits upon the Great White Throne, accepted as a sacrifice of value—to have this knowledge is to be lost as much in wonder as in gratitude.

Not at once may the broken in heart and soul dare to lift eyes of hope and thankfulness. Had we no other guide but instinct we should remain prostrate, penitent, ‘submitting,’ as Bishop Jeremy Taylor says, ‘to such sadness as God sends on us; patiently enduring the Cross of Sorrow which He sends as our punishment.’

Hope as we will, pray as we may, it can never be other than an agony to pass through this strait gate of repentance. The soul that passes easily may suspect itself from the beginning.

Yet the Slough of Despond is not of the same depth to each of us. It is the man or woman who has sinned against light, in the midst of light, who must suffer the more keenly for having chosen darkness.

Thorhilda Theyn, kneeling that night in a strange room, in a stranger’s home—alone and lonely, saddened, stricken, yearning, repentant, had no cry but one—that cry she uttered in the lowliest, the most utter self-abasement.

‘My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?’

Not long did she kneel there in the chill silence before an answer came.

‘Forsaken *thee*? Ah, no; I gave My life for thee. I strove to constrain thee by My Love—My Love alone! How often have I urged it upon thee, this Love of Mine, by how many ways! By the softness and ease of life I urged it; by the sweetness of human love and friendship I urged it; by the contrast of the pain and loneliness of other lives I urged it. In the stars of the midnight sky I spoke; in the flowers of the spring-time I whispered; each



rustling leaf, each dew-bright petal, was a plea ! . . . Forsake thee !

. . . Never did I leave thy side for one moment !

‘No ; I stood at the door of thy heart and knocked, but in vain.

‘My knocking was heard ; but it was not answered.

‘Not in so many words didst thou make to Me the old reply, “Come again at a more convenient season,” but such was the answer thy life made to Me. The result is at hand.’

Yet the tear-blinded, heart-broken woman knelt on. Though no comfort came, no help, she would yet remain where alone comfort could be.

And again, and ever again, came the cry :

‘My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me ?’

## CHAPTER L.

‘AT YOUR SOFT TOUCH OF PITY LET ME WEEP.’

‘Experience is like the stern-lights of a ship at sea, and illuminates only the track we have passed over.’—COLERIDGE.

HAPPINESS, dear ! Is that the rock on which you have been stranded ?

The speaker was a woman, young-looking for her age ; and, without consideration, one would add, beautiful.

It was not a face that people felt inclined to analyse. The expression of goodness, of quietness, of reserved strength, was of that unobtrusive kind which people accept without question. Few who knew Margaret Thurstone, and had a trouble, could help confiding in her ; though she did not always make such confidence quite easy. Her tendency being toward reticence, she had naturally a dread of the unguarded and unrestrained outpourings of others.

To-night she had had no fear ; no strain had been put upon her forbearance. From first to last she had listened to the story Thorhilda Theyn had told with interest, with sympathy ; yet with a growing wonder that a woman whose instincts were evidently pure and good, whose principles were upright, whose outlook over men and things was both clear and wide—that one apparently so irreproachable could yet have been so blinded, could yet have been permitted to fall so far from her own first estate as to be now lying, so to speak, in the very dust, with ashes of humiliation on a head that had always been held, perhaps unconsciously, a little proudly above its fellows. Certainly it was not quite easy to see beyond and behind this strange and sad complication.

Mrs. Thurstone’s life had been lived in the world. Though her means were now narrow, her way of living straitened, she had many friends who did not forget that she was the daughter of an admiral, the widow of a cavalry officer who had fallen in the Crimea. She herself at that time had not been twenty years of age ; her husband had not completed his thirtieth winter.



Her life since then had been not only pure and blameless, but those alone who were privileged to watch it closely knew of the ceaseless self-sacrifice, the untiring devotion with which she gave her time, her strength, and such means as she had, to the service of such as were yet poorer than herself. Her name was not in the newspapers, she sat on no committees, she organized no new and popular ways of being philanthropic. Yet it may be that she dared to think prayerfully of a time when she would hear the words, ‘*I was an hungered, and you gave Me meat.*’

Still, as it has been intimated, her life was not one of social seclusion. Her society was too much valued by such as understood for that to be possible. And so it was that she was able to estimate to the full the gravity of the thing that Thorhilda Theyn had done. A woman less conversant with the way of the modern world might have underrated the matter altogether; indeed, it is probable that Miss Theyn had a little hoped to be consoled by hearing some words that should betray that a lighter and easier view might be taken; but if so her hope was disappointed.

Margaret Thurstone’s memory was good; her affection enduring. Though so many years had passed since she had counted Squire Theyn’s dead wife among her friends—a friend older than herself by fourteen years, and possibly weaker in some ways, yet a woman so loving, so gentle, so full of all sweet human kindness that her memory could never be recalled without a sigh—though all this had been so long ago, Mrs. Thurstone had received the daughter of her dead friend almost without surprise, and certainly without regret.

It was chiefly from her Aunt Averil that Thorhilda had heard of Mrs. Thurstone; and though she had heard so little, that little had always been of a nature to lead her to conclude that her mother’s friend would be likely to be the friend of anyone in real trouble. So it was that in that hour of desperation her mind had been drawn to dwell with some hope upon the possibility of finding a refuge in the small house in Strafford Park where Mrs. Thurstone lived; and drawn so strongly that no other alternative seemed to present itself.

She had not regretted. Rather had the thought forced itself upon her mind that even in this hour of apparent rebellion a Guiding Hand had been over her. Certainly she had prayed for guidance, but it was with her as with most of us: we are astonished, somewhat appalled, when a prayer is directly and visibly answered.

Some hours had now passed since that twilight hour when Thorhilda had presented herself at Mrs. Thurstone’s door, pale, chilled, silent, yet with a look of supplication so evident on her beautiful face, that even before she had made herself known she had been made to feel most warmly welcome.

‘Do sit down here, by the fire, please!’ the hostess had urged in a kind, homely way. The cabman had been dismissed, tea ordered.



the lamp turned to its fullest height, the fire stirred to its brightest blaze, and all before the stranger's name was asked.

It was hardly needful to ask it, so strong was the resemblance between Thorhilda Theyn and her dead mother. Mrs. Thurstone felt no surprise, showed none, nor yet any curiosity.

'You shall tell me all when you have had some tea. Forgive me for saying that I know you have something to tell me—some trouble. Well, whatever it is, my life has been one long preparation for it, and without doubt He Who has prepared me has led you here.'

And now, at early midnight, all was told—told from the very beginning. The first weeks of doubt, of irresolution, the first dawning of trouble, the strong temptation, the almost overwhelming pressure, the dread alternative—all was laid bare; made so clear that the girl felt as if she had never seen her own position, her own place in the pitiful drama, before. Yet she was far from pitying herself; that was reserved for Mrs. Thurstone to do. All her own feeling was of the nature of blame.

And after this came the history of the way in which light had come at last; at least light enough to prevent the consummation of such a disaster as had doubtless led to a wreck even more terrible than this stranding on a strange rock in mid-ocean.

As a matter of course Damian Aldenmede's name was mentioned, and this with such effort, such betrayal, such evident suffering, as was sufficiently convincing.

Margaret Thurstone did not hear the artist's name for the first time, as she hastened to say, hating all concealments, all semblance of mystery, and useless suppression of simple fact.

'I know Mr. Aldenmede,' she said at once. 'I have known him many years.'

'Did you know that he was at Ulvstan Bight?'

'Yes; I helped in recommending him to go there—or at least to the north coast. He needed bracing, time for recruiting after the work he had done in the east of London.'

'I thought he had been much abroad?'

'So he had; but that was earlier in his life—I mean it was before his East-End work. . . . It was just after his sorrow—his most crushing sorrow.'

There was silence in the little room for a time. Mrs. Thurstone, silenced by reminiscences, sat looking into the fire, her patient, thoughtful, beautiful face the more beautiful for its expression of rapt musing.

The face opposite to hers, though, perhaps, strictly speaking, the lovelier of the two, and by far the younger, was yet at the present moment the less attractive to look upon. Keen, overpowering, remorseful sorrow is seldom altogether winning.

'Could you tell me of Mr. Aldenmede's trouble?' Thorhilda asked at last, speaking with a strange timidity.

Margaret Thurstone paused a moment before answering.



‘There is no valid reason, none at all, why I should not tell you all I know,’ she replied presently. ‘But I think it would not be very wise to tell you to-night.’

Thorhilda had no strength left wherewith to beseech for the knowledge she so earnestly desired to have. Personal grief will impair the strongest curiosity, and there is nothing like sorrow for softening the tone of even the most argumentative.

Very skilfully Mrs. Thurstone turned the conversation back to Thorhilda’s own trouble. It was not a difficult thing to do.

‘And you had no plan in coming here, dear?’ she said kindly. ‘No especial idea about your future?’

‘Nothing very clear,’ the girl replied, forcing the hot tears back. ‘I knew that you were working amongst the poor. I thought that perhaps I might help you; but then——’ (this came with extreme difficulty) ‘but then, how shall I live? . . . I have no money, no talent. . . . What can I do?’

In Mrs. Thurstone’s own mind there was the certainty that Miss Theyn would very soon go back to the Rectory at Yarburgh; but she had too much tactful sympathy to say so at present. One thing, however, she must say.

‘I think I understood that you had not left your address, or any clue to your present whereabouts, at Yarburgh?’ she asked in a studiously matter-of-fact tone.

But Thorhilda’s conscience heard reproach where none was.

‘I could not—no, I could not! Besides, for *their* sakes—for the sake of my uncle and aunt—I thought it better not, far better . . . . Believe me!’ the girl besought earnestly. ‘Believe me, I weighed the matter all round, thought of things on the one side and on the other; and, knowing that blame could fall upon me alone, I judged it better to do what I have done. Had I left an address, it would but have seemed like an invitation to—to them to follow me, to persuade me—to persuade me to do what I had solemnly promised to do, and that after weeks, months—nay, I may almost say years of indecision.’

‘Forgive me for interrupting you; but that all points to a too narrow environment. A month in a wider social atmosphere would have shown you your own mind.’

‘Perhaps so,’ Thorhilda replied; ‘but all the same, I ought to have known my own mind as matters stood—or at any rate *I should have more clearly recognised the fact that I did not know it.*’

There was another pause.

The fire was yet burning with a subdued glow of cheerfulness; the sleet now and then dashed upon the window-panes; the wind was moaning sadly in the casement. Above its passing moan came the words, uttered slowly, firmly, solemnly:

‘*He that followeth Me walketh not in darkness.*’

‘I believe *that*—I believe it with all my heart, with all my soul,’ Thorhilda answered, while the hot tears dropped on her cheek. . .



'Yet—yet it seems hard to follow when the leading points only to pain—only to suffering.'

'To what *seems* pain. . . . Can you not trust? Can you not *see* that all such sorrow is certainly turned into joy, as He promised it should be? While the other way—the wider way—with all its flowers and all its joys, quite as certainly leads on to darkness, and to pain, and to bitterness and to misery. . . . Oh! when—*when* will human beings believe that Christ brought light upon their human path, that *He came to bring it?* . . . Oh, what—what is it in us—we *know*, we *see*, we *believe*, and we turn away, always meaning to come back to the narrower way some time. Meanwhile, path leads to path, flowers lead on to flowers. Then suddenly we awake—and all is thorns and darkness.'

'Not suddenly—no, not suddenly,' Thorhilda interposed; 'we see it coming—the darkness. We feel the touch of the thorns that are to wound so deeply . . . . and we turn away. To the last we turn—to the last the flowery way amuses us, distracts us, though all the while we see the end.'

'Yet it is something—nay, much, that we do see it? Are you not glad that you see with open eyes at the present moment?'

'Glad? . . . gladness for me? . . . sight for me?' Thorhilda exclaimed in surprise. . . . 'There is only one light—it is upon the past. . . . Is that enough for me? Is it enough for any human being?'

'It is as much as the most of us get—and more than that: it is as much as the wisest people hope for. Believe me, the happiest state of all is a state of perfect trust—strong, hopeful trust that all will yet be well. That may seem like a platitude; but happy are the people whose lives can be best expressed by a succession of platitudes.'

'How you repeat the word "happy"! To me, *now*, it is the deadest word of a dead language. . . . And yet, ah me! I remember one morning, not so long ago—it was but last spring, in fact—when I stood by the sea, a blue, bright, sparkling sea, with a blue, bright, shining sky overhead, and spent my forenoon in wondering why I was so happy. . . . Is it possible that morning was not a year ago?'

'And your mind dwelt all on happiness?'

'All on happiness—in perfect gratitude—because I was so very happy. . . . And yet I did not understand it; and afterward I began to question it—then to place the unhappiness of others in a sort of balance, to weigh their patient, struggling, unselfish life against my own selfish and self-seeking one.'

'And the result?'

'The result was simply dissatisfaction.'

'It should have gone deeper than that.'

'It has gone deeper now—*too late!*'

'Too late? And you not yet twenty-three?'

'Age has little to do with it. A vessel shipwrecked on its first voyage or the last—where is the difference to the drowned crew—



the hull upturned upon the barren rock? Shipwreck is shipwreck, when the vessel is wrecked utterly. And the analogy holds good—a human life wrecked at twenty or at sixty, what matters! The few years are nothing!

‘Pardon me! They are everything, as you will yet see. But I will not speak of that now. I want to help you more closely, more surely; and to do that I must see what your present wishes are. And let me say, once for all, how glad I am, how grateful, that you should have had such trust in me as to come here and let me help you as best I may—it is even flattering, though I know you do not mean it for that. Let that idea go with some others. It is late now; but even before I sleep I would like to have some idea of what I can do for you. . . . First, in the early morning, I must send a telegram to Canon Godfrey.’

‘You must do that?’

‘Yes, certainly. Think of him—the torture of uncertainty he is undergoing!’

But when Mrs. Thurstone looked up, Miss Theyne was not thinking. She was lying back in her easy-chair, white, pallid, unconscious.

‘How thoughtless I have been—how very thoughtless!’ Mrs. Thurstone said, reproaching herself. ‘I forgot her sleepless night, her long journey, her terrible anxiety. . . . Oh me, when will one learn to be human?’

## CHAPTER LI.

### ‘WHEN HOPE LIES DEAD.’

‘O friend, I know not which way I must look  
For comfort, being as I am, opprest.’

WORDSWORTH.

THE snow was still falling, the wind still wailing up the narrow suburban street. Indoors, lamps were being lighted and curtains drawn, though it was yet but three in the afternoon. People were glad to make believe that the night had come, or rather the evening—the long, bright, warm, English winter’s evening—not the least favourable time for discovering and enjoying the peculiar happiness of English home-life—a life that has a flavour all its own, and only to be discovered after acquaintance with life as it is lived elsewhere.

It is not to be wondered over that happy English people should return to the scene of their happiness a little vain, a little supercilious perhaps—and as a rule, very well contented; the latter is not the least of the good effects produced by change of scene.

Canon Godfrey had known what it was to spend a winter abroad, to shiver in the marble corridors of Florentine palaces, to linger on the sunny side of the street so long as there was a warm ray to tempt him, then to go indoors to a carpetless room—to walls glittering with mirrors, and gilding, and faded frescoes. Somewhere there would be a big white china stove—very handsome, perhaps—



but being so very unfamiliar, would certainly also be unattractive, and less equal to the task of persuading him of its use than of its architectural beauty.

The Canon was a man sufficiently sensitive to such things ; and being given—far more than the world about him at Yarburgh knew—to testing himself, his strength of soul, by various self-denials and asceticisms, he had come to know how very keen was his appreciation of what people call domestic comfort. A man who had simply gone on taking life as it came, enjoying all his meals with no more than the ordinary restraint prescribed by social usage, who had indulged in the luxuries of fire and warm clothing whenever these might seem to be needed, who had accepted all the services and attentions common to his position without question—such a one would have known far less of himself, of his own weakness, than the Canon knew ; would have suffered far less from strife before his falls, or what he counted such, and from compunction afterward. And whatever may be said for or against the view he took, and the things done and suffered in consequence of that view, this at least is certain, he kept his inner life most certainly alive, his soul's life was at least as vivid as his outer life.

Was this double existence the reason—or one reason, why his life was being lived so rapidly ?

He did not know how rapidly it was going. Suspicion had passed away with the momentary sense of physical failure that gave it birth.

Yet now and again suspicion returned—never causelessly.

This afternoon, travelling between London and Peterborough, he knew that there had been a time of oblivion—‘the oblivion of sleep,’ some might have suggested ; but though ordinary sleep may undoubtedly cause a man's pulse to beat more faintly, it does not so impair the action of his heart that the pulse ceases altogether, and only resumes its working after a very convulsion of the forces of nerve and brain.

The Canon, coming to himself after such a moment, recognised once more all that had happened—and the recognition was made with most reverential wonder.

‘How many times will it be thus ?’ he asked himself. ‘How much of nerve-force is there in me, to enable me to fight with death thus and overcome ?’

‘It is not my doing—this returning. . . . In my powerless brain there is no effort—no desire. . . . Life strives with death ; and so long as God wills life will overcome. . . . Some day—it may be soon—there will come the moment when God will decree that the strife shall end otherwise. . . . And I . . . I do not murmur. I do not dread that moment—not with more than the ordinary human and natural dread of the unknown ! Were it not for others, I should be even glad to go.’

He did not, even to himself, admit the fact that it was these same ‘others’ who had so largely taken the joy, the strength, from



his past life, who were so certainly helping to make him weary of the present.

Naturally his thought turned almost at once to the niece of whom he had been thinking all day—nay, for many days. Not once had a reproach darkened his desire to meet her again—to console her. It may be that he alone knew the depth of her great need for consolation. Others might blame—doubtless were blaming, even then ; but even upon this blame of others Hugh Godfrey was not drawn to dwell.

Love itself does not always enable people to understand, to exonerate the one beloved. There must be something beyond—and that something is the divine love which is named charity. ‘It is charity that beareth all things ; hopeth all things ; and charity never faileth.’

‘I *will* be gentle . . . . and passing gentle,

the fierce Sir Balin resolved within himself at a moment of somewhat fierce temptation. And because his word is so simple and natural we know it will be kept.

Hugh Godfrey’s resolve was of a different nature.

It was a holy thought brought to his memory by the sudden sight of a cup embossed with a simple spiritual scene, that enabled the knight in the poem to overcome. It was a holy thought, brought to his mind by a book carried always in his pocket, that enabled Canon Godfrey to confront a weighty moment with the strength and calmness he desired. The chapter in the little book was entitled ‘OF FAMILIAR FRIENDSHIP WITH JESUS.’ And the first words of the chapter were these :

‘When Jesus is present, all is well, and nothing seems difficult ; but when Jesus is absent, everything becomes hard.’

‘*When Jesus is present,*’ Canon Godfrey repeated to himself at the moment when most he needed the strength of the idea. So that afterward the hour seemed far from having been one of supreme difficulty.

Mrs. Thurstone’s little room was bright and cheerful. She herself was quieter than usual in her manner—this by reason of the force of her strong sympathy. Thorhilda rose to her feet with a little cry that had in it as much of pleasure as of pain. The Canon’s kiss on her forehead, calm and tender and full of all forgiveness, was what she expected, not what she deserved. Margaret Thurstone could not help some wonder, perhaps even some slight touch of enviousness. Her own life was so lone ; it had been lonely so long. Yet it was not of herself that she was consciously thinking. The Canon’s face, the pain written there, the long-suffering, could not be hidden from one who had herself suffered so deeply. Ah ! how could anyone cause fresh sorrow, fresh wounding to a man so good, so generous as this man seemed to be ? And all too surely this new event must be a terrible thing in his sight. For awhile she left the uncle and niece alone ; and the first few



moments were passed in silence, save for the sound of subdued weeping.

'I will let her cry for awhile,' he had said to himself as he sat there by his niece, holding her hot, tremulous hand in his own. Then, all unawares, his own tears began to fall; and Thorhilda, seeing this, knew misery more bitter than any she had known yet.

'Uncle Hugh! Uncle Hugh!' she cried passionately, falling at his feet as she spoke; 'I cannot bear this—I cannot.'

'No, my child,' he replied; 'I do not wonder that you cannot, since these are probably the first tears you have caused anyone to shed since you were born. . . . Forgive them; and believe this—they are tears of gladness quite as much as of sorrow. And the sorrow is as much for you as for myself—nay, more. All day I have been thinking of what you must have suffered in secret before—before you took such a step as this. . . . Thorda, Thorda, how was it that you could not confide in me? How was it? Could you think for one moment that even undue persuasion would be used? Could you think that, in a matter so important as your marriage, we should wish to influence you in the least degree in any direction to which your own inclination was opposed? I cannot understand—no, even yet I cannot understand!'

There was no reproach in his tone, but the pain was unmistakable, and it was some time before any answer could be made.

'I cannot understand myself, Uncle Hugh,' the girl said, with sobs and tears. 'I cannot comprehend *now* how I could be tempted by mere external things so far. But I *was* tempted—tempted to sell my soul—it was nothing less than that, that I might be the mistress of Ormston Magna. *That* was my dream. Of myself, as Mr. Meredith's wife, I would not and could not think—not until it was too late. Then it was forced upon me. The letters of congratulation, the sayings that dropped from people's lips—nay, the very books and newspapers that I read, there was a time when everything seemed to force upon me all that married life, *without love*, really meant. But all too late. I looked about for some way of escape. I thought of it night and day till my brain would think no more. . . . I did not think at last. . . . It seemed to be someone else who was listening to your sermon, someone else within me, yet not in sympathy with me—with what I was about to do—who said: "These words are for you: it is you who are exchanging your soul, selling it for the mess of pottage that is offered to you in the guise of wealth, and ease, and luxury. Take it, and it shall be dust and ashes in your mouth, and you shall find no place of repentance—no, not though you seek it carefully with tears."'

Another time of silence passed, but it was sufficiently eloquent silence. The girl felt all the forgiveness, all the comprehension, all the compassion she so greatly needed. Yet there was weight and heart-ache and dread behind.

It was she who spoke first,



‘Don’t let us talk more of the past than is needful, Uncle Hugh,’ she entreated. ‘You do forgive me all that I have done—the pain I have caused you, the disgrace?’

‘Forgive, my child! . . . Yes, as I hope to be forgiven. . . . Do you quite forgive me?’

‘For what?’

‘For want of insight—nay, for worse than that. . . . Let me confess once for all, that I wished that you might care for Percival Meredith; that I wished to see you there, at Ormston, happy, free from care, in a position you seemed created to fill. Doubt dawned upon me very slowly. The words I said in the church were said half against my will. They were not my own words. I spoke them to you, and you know that I did, but I was compelled to speak them.’

‘I knew it. . . . I knew also that you could not have said them privately.’

‘You felt that?’

‘Intimately, . . . And now again, let me ask you to think more of what is to be. . . . I have been thinking of it—thinking ceaselessly, intensely. And now I trust my way is clear.’

‘It is quite clear to me.’

Thorhilda’s face, the sudden change in the expression of it, showed that she apprehended the idea that was in her uncle’s mind.

‘What is clear to you?’ she asked, in altered tones.

‘That you must return to Yarrow with me to-morrow.’

Again there was a long pause, more weighty, more troubled than before.

‘You have thought of *that*—you have even considered it possible! . . . Oh, Uncle Hugh!’

‘Do not think that I am speaking selfishly, still less carelessly. . . . Believe me, I have thought out the matter on every side. Do what we will, there will be pain for you, pain for me. I am persuaded that what I urge will be for the best in every way.’

And then with clearness, with eloquence even, with affection, the Canon went on to unfold his views.

Miss Theyn listened, wishing passionately to be convinced. To return to the Rectory—to the one home she had known and loved with the love of the untravelled, the inexperienced, was the one bright vision she had.

But instinct, strong within her, spoke unpalatable truths. ‘If you return *now*,’ it said, ‘you will draw down upon those who are dearest to you the odium, the gossip, the scandal of a whole neighbourhood with fresh acrimony. Remain here, devote yourself to some high and noble work, thus proving your repentance, and inevitably you will regain for yourself, and for others, the belief in your integrity which is the secret of all force in the nerves of the social life of each one of us. Unhappily for you, you have let in the air of suspicion. The work of reducing it must be the work of years; and that work will be best done away from the scene of



your fall. It would be presuming upon power that you have not to return at the present moment.'

Thus convinced herself—though all against her desire—it was impossible but that this erring and suffering woman's language should be all-convincing. Canon Godfrey could only bow his head in token of his sorrowful yielding.

'I will come back again, Uncle Hugh; do not fear but that I shall come back—but not now; it cannot be now. And when I do, we must be prepared. My coming back will have much pain in it—double pain for me, because I must bear yours as well as my own. Even yet I do not comprehend all that I must suffer. The heart-searching, the repentance that must come before myself can be restored to myself, will alone show me the strife of the days to be. And much of that suffering must be in enduring the judgment of others; righteous judgment, doubtless, but not the less difficult to bear. Yet it must be borne. even I, with all my inexperience, know that. Look at the greater biographies of our own literature. Does Shelley's splendid poetry cover his cruelty to Harriet Westbrook? Is Carlyle's domestic misery quite lost sight of—as it ought to be—when we look at the shelves groaning under the work of a long, and suffering, and resolute life? No, Uncle Hugh. Once, long ago, you preached a sermon on retribution, and in that sermon you quoted these words:

**"As every body hath its shadow, so every sin hath its punishment."**

The words struck me then, when no very definite sin had cast its shadow over my soul. Now they seem as if they might have been written for me, and for me only.'

The Canon listened, with sorrow enough, but also with comprehension.

'Tell me,' he said at last—'tell me the details of your plan. I suppose you are intending to help Mrs. Thurstone in some work of hers?'

'Yes; Mrs. Thurstone is willing to teach me, if it be possible for me to remain with her, or rather in the Infirmary where she spends so much of her life. . . I have everything to learn.'

The Canon understood. Here was a chance for him to make it impossible; but his soul was not low enough of stature to enable him to pass by ways like this.

He could only silently watch his niece for awhile. 'Everything to learn!' Did she know all that her own word included? Did she, who had never known what it was to be called in the morning before her own bell rang, who had been accustomed to retire at any hour in the evening when she might feel fatigued—did she even dream of what it might be to sit all night, night after night, in the ward of a hospital? Had she any save the most vague idea of what the life of a professional nurse must be? Had she taken account of the weariness, the disgust, the painful sights and sounds



to which she must become accustomed, before she could be of the smallest use ?

He knew that she had not—that she had no data to go upon which would enable her to arrive at the conclusions that were disturbing his own vision of her chosen future. Chosen ?—no, as he knew too well, it was a future from which every nerve was recoiling with a dread little short of anguish.

His affection, never greater than now, his intimate knowledge of the girl, so wrought upon and within him, that his anguish was no less than hers. And all the while his heart was crying out against the idea of his lonely return, of the loneliness of the days to be. His wife was there at Yarburgh, awaiting him—true. And her loneliness, her unhappiness, would be added to the weight of his own.

You cannot take a dog or bird to your heart, keep it there for years, and then lose it, but you shall find an aching gap. How much keener the aching when you wake to miss a sympathetic human being, one who has loved you, trusted to you for everything, rested upon your thought, your energy, your providence, for everything that you were glad to give, and that other heart was glad to receive ! Such wrenchings asunder are amongst the bitterest and most abiding pains humanity can know.

The words of the wisest consoler are fewest in the presence of such sorrow as this. So Mrs. Thurstone felt when the moment of parting came. She stood by, yet a little apart, till the last. Then she came forward.

‘Will you leave your niece to me, Canon Godfrey ? Will you trust me, believing that I will do my best for her ?’

The words were uttered in that peculiar voice, every intonation of which tells of the long chastening of sorrow ; and beside that, there was the gentle charm of the gentlest womanhood.

‘Can I trust you ?’ he asked, in a broken way, full of all effort. ‘The question is, can I thank you ? I feel that I cannot.’

Mrs. Thurstone smiled.

‘You know how little one needs to be thanked,’ she said. ‘How is it that words are so inadequate—that—that other things are so much ?’

‘Ah !’ the Canon replied ; ‘how is it, indeed ? We know nothing yet, nothing of each other, nothing of the language we employ, nothing of the significance of every look, every glance, every gesture. We know all about the internal economy of every beehive in the land, every ant’s nest, every fish’s pebble-and-weed constructed bridal-bower. Of ourselves we know nothing—nothing but this, that one day we *shall* know.’

Was it the light of that other day that was in his eyes as he went out ? The look on his face was calm, resolute, as if he had determined that all sadness should be subdued. There were no last words ; the final parting was brief, silent. Miss Theyn went to her own room to shed her tears in silence, and they were very bitter. Did she yet comprehend all that she had done ?



## CHAPTER LII.

‘SHALL WE SEE TO IT, I AND YOU?’

‘He looked at her as a lover can ;  
She looked at him as one who awakes ;  
The past was a sleep, and her life began.’

ROBERT BROWNING.

It often happens in this bleak north country of ours that we have a glorious foretaste of spring some time in the month of February. Soft rains fall, the grass looks greener, the skies look bluer, the air all at once grows soft and warm as any air of June. And how one rejoices in it while it lasts, coming, as it usually does, between two severe winters ! The winter to come, as we know too well, will be almost as long as the winter gone, and certainly as chill. Invalids venture out into sunny valleys, the tenderest infants are taken abroad ; young and old seem to rejoice as if something had happened of a nature peculiarly pleasurable. And all this because the sun shines and the air is warm. Do we even now clearly recognise how certainly cold and dulness are of the nature of pain ?

The lanes between Yarburgh and Ormston Magna are very much like certain Devonshire lanes. They are narrow, uneven, and they lie between deep hedgrows that in summer are all luxuriant. Though they be brown and bare in winter, they have still a charm of their own, a charm not wanting in either form or colour. The last year’s bramble-leaves turn crimson in the pale sun, or show touches of amber and russet, of gold and green ; late grasses quiver ; the hemlock seeds spread gray-white discs in the upper hedgerow, giving you a sky-line of wonderful picturesqueness. Then, too, the bare trees, in all their beauty of branching and curving, seem to claim new attention because of the sun-bright blue behind and above ; and no patch of green, or gray, or cream-coloured lichen loses force for the need of light. It is on such days as these that we begin to recognise all that light must mean in the lands where light is a perpetual and natural thing. And such light ! Only the eyes that have wakened to the glory and intensity of the rays of southern suns can know all that we owe to the beneficence of light.

Yet a February day in England, such a day as we have spoken of, is not a time to be passed without enjoyment.

‘It is simply glorious !’ Miss Douglas was saying, in her clear, loud, yet most musical voice, to a gentleman she had met sauntering along Langrick Lane in the middle of a February afternoon. It may be that her voice was more musical than usual, the sparkle of her eyes brighter, the colour on her lip and cheek deeper and lovelier because the gentleman was Mr. Percival Meredith.

It had so happened that these two had not met since what was spoken of in certain circles as ‘the catastrophe.’

Perhaps it was not altogether so unsuitable a word as it might



seem at first glance to a scholar to be. Without doubt, Miss Theyn's flight from home was of the nature of 'an overthrow,' of 'a great calamity,' of 'a violent convulsion' in humanity if not in nature.

As a matter of course, by one name or by another, the occurrence had been the great topic of conversation in the neighbourhood of Yarburgh ever since the fatal-seeming day on which it happened. And equally, as a matter of course, different people took different views of the affair. It was sad to note how few judged charitably.

Perhaps it might be sadder still to note how few suspended their judgment, how few refused to pronounce any final verdict at all. And it was significant that in nineteen cases out of twenty the blame was thrown solely upon Miss Theyn.

It seemed as if it were impossible that a man still young in a certain sense, undoubtedly handsome—'handsomer than ever,' so close observers were saying—and undoubtedly rich, it was impossible that any blame whatever should lie with one so favoured on every side. This may seem a crude way of stating the truth; but not Virgil himself, with his dainty ten lines a day, could add to the truthfulness.

Inevitably Miss Douglas understood; she had understood all along the line of this strange and painful matter. And she knew Percival Meredith almost better than she knew herself. She had much in her favour.

'It is simply glorious!' she said, meeting Mr. Meredith in Langrick Lane, and swinging her crimson parasol with its deep border of cream-coloured lace behind her head, so that only the softest reflection of the soft February sun should lie upon her face. She was looking well, as she knew—a source of strength, even of genius, to the plainest woman in the world. Once be assured that you are looking your own best, and you have nothing to fear from the handsomest woman in your neighbourhood.

So much lies in consciousness—nay, much more than this. It is only when you get beyond being conscious at all that you can afford to forget, to ignore. By that time you have got beyond much else, much that can never trouble you, or gladden you again.

Gertrude Douglas was still in the time of gladness, of hope, of perturbation; her manner betrayed all three.

Percival Meredith was not slow to understand. Something he had understood before to-day. He replied to the rather gushing greeting of Miss Douglas with the air of well-bred calm she had so long admired. His dark eyes looked darker and more inscrutable than ever; his fine figure seemed taller, more compact. He had the demeanour of a man unembarrassed, disengaged, thoroughly master of himself.

'Yes, it is perfect weather for England' he said, and Miss Douglas made quick reply.



'But I understood that you were not going to spend your spring in England. We were told that you were going to Rome.'

'Ah, so I have heard before! . . . Why Rome, I wonder. I have been there so often!'

'Then you have not thought of it?'

'Not for a moment.'

'You had not intended to leave home?'

'Not at present; certainly not. . . . Why should I?'

'Why should you?' Miss Douglas asked, shrugging her shoulders in a way that would have been pretty had her shoulders been slighter. 'Why should you, indeed? but that everybody expected it of you. It was the only decent thing to be done.'

Percival Meredith was not quite unaccustomed to what is termed 'chaff'; nay, it said much for his education in that direction that he bore Miss Douglas's insinuations not only without wincing, but with a certain amount of enjoyment.

'I begin to comprehend,' he said, speaking with an affectation of faintness, exhaustion; yet this suggested, rather than overdone.

'You *begin* to comprehend! What have you been doing all this while?'

'What have I been doing? . . . Oh, well, various things! . . . I have had my portrait taken.'

'You have? . . . at this juncture? . . . What a confession! . . . For the next *fiancée*, I suppose?'

'Yes, for the next,' Mr. Meredith replied, still with the air of one striving against extreme over-fatigue. 'The next, or the one after that,' he added. 'Who can say?'

Miss Douglas laughed—a long, low, cheery, pleasant laugh—and Percival Meredith listened with something more than amusement. Long ago he had noted, for his own private remembrance, how pleasant a laugh that of Gertrude Douglas would be for a man to have at his fireside whenever he should care to hear it! At this moment it seemed pleasanter than ever.

When Miss Douglas spoke again there was a decided change in the tone of her voice; it was gentler, more serious; her large, dark, beautiful eyes were dilated with a new interest, a new compassion in the expression of them. Never before had she been so winning. Percival Meredith felt his heart beating with a new emotion as he listened.

'I am glad. I am so glad you are taking it all so beautifully; and there was genuine sympathy in her every accent. 'Do forgive me,' she continued. 'I have thought so much of you, wondered how you would bear, how you would *really* bear; not how you *would* be seeming to keep up before the world: of *that* I had no fear; but of how you were enduring what I knew must be such sorrow! . . . Oh, I must say it—Thorda was my friend, *is* my friend, but she *was* cruel!'

For a moment, one silent undecided moment, Mr. Meredith's face wore a shade of sadness,



‘You are right; it was cruel,’ he admitted. ‘And it was gratuitous cruelty. Even then, at that last moment, Miss Theyn might have gained her freedom, if that was what she wanted, by steps less painful to me. . . But there! you have betrayed me into breaking my resolve, my ~~most~~ strong resolve. I had not wished to mention that name to anyone.’

‘How good of you, and how wise! . . . But—but I am not “anyone,” surely?’

‘I believe that though you are Miss Theyn’s friend, Miss Douglas, you yet have some feeling of friendship for me. I trust I may take so much consolation to myself.’

This was said so impressively, with so much meaning behind, that the rosy glow on Miss Douglas’s face deepened to a sudden blush.

‘If you will let me be your friend, *really* your friend, well, I can only say that my life will be happier than it has been for a long while. . . It has not been too happy of late.’

Mr. Meredith paused, not startled, not amused, but wondering once more whither things were tending.

‘Then it is a compact,’ he said presently, meeting Miss Douglas’s rather anxious but still beautiful eyes as he spoke. ‘It is a compact. If I need a friend, or rather friendship, I am to look to you. And on your side, will you say the same?’

‘Indeed, I will, and gladly! . . . There is more I could say, but I will not now.’

‘No? Have I been thoughtless? Have I kept you standing here too long? Pardon me.’

‘Has it been long? Surely not? . . . But I will say “good-bye.”’

‘Say, rather, *au revoir*. I must see you again soon—very soon.’

• • • • •

So they parted, there in the white sunny lane. Gertrude Douglas was so happy, so hopeful, so excited in her hopeful happiness that, meeting Mrs. Kerne a quarter of an hour later, even that lady’s curt ungraciousness had no really subduing effect.

‘Tell me about dear Thorda?’ she had begged in a manner even more effusive than usual. ‘Do tell me all about her; *do* tell me she is happy.’

‘You know as much of “dear Thorda” as I do; and in all likelihood a great deal more,’ was Mrs. Kerne’s brusque reply.

It was not Miss Douglas’s way to take offence at anybody or anything. With more true skilfulness than she might have been supposed to possess, she smoothed down the too-obvious angles of the other’s mood, and contrived to extract some information that she had really desired to have; for the two letters she had received from Thorhilda had both of them been too brief, too reticently sad, to be quite satisfying to one who had so keen a love of detail as Gertrude Douglas. Besides, if she had a genuine affection for



anyone, that person was Thorhilda Theyn ; and unquestionably her love had been strained of late.

Of course she still went to the Rectory, but less frequently than before. The Canon was still the same courteous and thoughtful host, but change had passed upon him. He was older-looking, sadder, more silent, and though he did not wish to betray that the presence of his niece's most intimate friend was a pain to him, he could not quite hide the fact. Mrs. Godfrey made small pretence of hiding her feeling, her suffering. At first she had burst into tears every time Miss Douglas entered the house, and still she would sit quietly weeping over her embroidery, making no effort to check her abundant tears. Miss Douglas could bear much, but even for her the Rectory was not now attractive.

But after that February day her thought was less drawn to the Rectory. Disappointment had not taught her the unwisdom of hoping, of darting thought and hope far into the unknown future. Ah, well, life is not all disappointment ; and as the Italian proverb has it, 'The world is for him that has patience.'

### CHAPTER LIII.

'LOVE, HOPE, FEAR, FAITH, THESE MAKE HUMANITY.'

'I dwell alone—I dwell alone, alone,  
 Whilst full, my river flows down to the sea,  
 Gilded with flashing boats  
 That bring no friend to me :  
 O love-songs, gurgling from a hundred throats,  
 O love-pangs, let me be.'

CHRISTINA ROSSETTI.

THAT spring was not a easy or a happy time for Barbara Burdas, yet the girl had never been more brave, more bright.

She hardly knew herself how much of the brightness was due to the presence of 'Nan Tyas's baby,' as some people called it, others speaking of it as 'Bab's Ildy,' which perhaps pleased her better. Bab was a true child-lover, and to feel the little one's arms clinging about her neck, to watch the big blue eyes that looked into hers so wonderingly, so gravely, to note the growing intelligence of the frequent smile—all this was as new inspiration in Bab's life, and caused her to double efforts that had certainly been sufficiently strenuous before.

But, then, effort had not been so greatly needed. Barbara was not now in the darkness she had once been in. She read all such books and papers and magazines as came in her way ; and as we all know, when once the appetite for reading is established, it seems as if, by some miracle, aliment more or less is provided, enough for the keeping up of the appetite, if not enough for its satisfaction. The post brought to Barbara such parcels as oft enough gave her happiness for a whole week or more—pure, untainted, sterling happiness. And now it was beginning to be more than this. She was already



able to perceive that the world, or a sufficient portion of it, was awake to the fact that the British fisheries were decreasing ; were threatened by injury in the way of trawling ; by hurt in the way of fishing at harmful seasons, in unsuitable grounds. If writers were thus writing of these things, if members of Parliament were thus speaking of them, then surely down even in such poor little homes as her own the results would be seen.

‘Ay, so they may,’ said old Ephraim, taking his pipe from his mouth, and knocking out the ashes with the slow deliberation he had used for so many, many years, performing the act always as if a little regret attached to it, a little solemnity. ‘So we may see the good on it—an’ yet, no, not *us*, not *me* for sartain ; and mebbly not even you, Bab ; no, nor Jack, nor Steve even ; whoä can saäy ; they’re that slow, them Parlyment foäks. They don’t do nothin’, so Ah’ve heärd said, till they’re fairly forced, an’ then it’s agin the graäin, so as it’s not done hearty, nor rightly, after all. Ah well ! poor folks mon’t complain ; ’t isn’t right as they should. Ah’ve heerd mah greet-gran’father saäy, him as died afore this centherry was born—Ah’ve heerd him saäy as ’twere a bad sign when poor folks began wi’ complainin’. An’ so Ah think, Bab ; so Ah think ! Ah never holds wi’ no complainin’ !’

And Barbara smiled, and set her grandfather’s supper of boiled milk and bread on a little coarse creamy damask cloth, and raked the ashes of the coal fire together, and then threw in a little log of wood, so that he might go to bed in all the comfort of warmth and satisfaction.

‘I like to hear you say that, gran’father,’ she said cheerfully, sitting down beside him, and taking her own supper ; ‘I like to hear you speak so ; not as you did this morning. Why, you almost broke my heart !’

The old man, hearing his granddaughter’s words, was visibly affected. He put down his spoon, turned a little in his chair, and rested his poor old head upon his hand, as if a sudden aching had rendered it insupportable. Unhappily, Barbara understood it all, understood his wishing to be cheery and bright. And yet she had touched upon a point better avoided. It is those who seldom make mistakes of this kind who suffer most when sudden indiscretion betrays them.

‘An’ *there* ! I’ve done it again,’ she cried, kneeling down upon the brick floor, and putting her uplifted hands upon the old man’s knees. ‘I’ve been foolish an’ thought’less again. But I never meant it, gran’father ; I never did. I thought as how you’d only been depressed this morning when you talked of going to sea again ; of leaving the place where you’ve stayed now this thirty years an’ never dreaming of leavin’ it no more. I know you haven’t ; an’ therefore, oft enough when I’ve been straitened for the rent—or worse still, for the rate—I’ve never let you know for fear it might unsettle you. These are terrible times, I know ; though I’ve done my best that noan under this roof save myself should know quite



how terrible they were. If milk's been scarce, and butter scarcer yet, why we've never known the need of a loaf of bread ; an' if the tea's been weak at times, why we've always had a bit left in the caddy. And all round us there's been folks so much worse off than we are ; nay, I doubt if some of them's touched the bottom yet. I know more than I care to say, gran'father, an' I don't wish to say no more. No ! I'll go on doin' the very best I can, only so as you'll go on too ; just putting up with things ; taking the soup when it isn't much to speak of, an' not mindin' when the butter won't go on to the end of the week—just bein' patient, as you've allus been. Say you will, gran'father ? My heart's ached all day with the few words you let drop this morning. . . . You didn't mean them, did you ?'

The old man was trembling, a tear or two dropped over his poor withered cheeks, but he tried to put away Bab's fears as well as he could without making any definite promise.

'We'll see, honey ; we'll see !' he replied, turning to the table again, and pretending to care greatly for his supper.

Barbara was not deceived.

The next few days were passed as people pass the time in a house when one is threatened with some fatal illness. No word was spoken willingly that might even lead to the dreaded topic. Naturally this made a kind of strain, only discernible by the increased gentleness of deed and word ; the continued and sensitive consciousness of the love that existed, and seemed to be growing—tenderly and sadly growing because of fear and pain. What would the end be ?

All Barbara's other troubles seemed to sink under this for the time being. It was a long while now since she had seen Hartas Theyn. One evening, sauntering to the cliff-top in the twilight, with little Ildy in her arms, she had met him suddenly in the cleft between the rocks where the beck came tumbling down to the sea over the rough boulders. He was looking very pale for a man who was now, as Barbara knew, literally working on a farm from morn till night. Canon Godfrey had told her of how he had offered to help the Squire's son to begin life afresh in some other direction.

'But he is wise, very wise,' the Canon said, speaking with a warmth and emphasis that had been conspicuously absent from his words and ways of late. 'Hartas is doing the best thing he could do in devoting himself heart and soul to the only kind of work he knows anything about. And he is not sparing himself. It is true that he has every incentive. . . .'

Then the Canon stopped suddenly. In speaking of incentives he had in his mind the encumbered condition of the Squire's estate ; the possibility that hard work and carefulness, with some knowledge, some forethought, might do much to bring again some of the old prosperous state of things upon which the owners of Garlaff had presumed so long. But then another idea made him pause, and then add, with meaning :



‘Every inducement but one : that one would perhaps have been the strongest of all ! . . . I am proud of him that he is trying to live as if it were his !’

Barbara understood, as the Canon saw, but she was not the happier for that brief interview. Perhaps the fact that during absence, during silence, during much loneliness, with pain of many kinds, Barbara’s love had gone on growing, her regard deepening, perhaps this very fact prevented her views from changing, as she knew that Hartas was waiting for them to change.

Did he know, did he dream, did anyone dream of the terrible hours of terrible temptation through which the girl had to pass ? Yet she had not wavered, and Hartas was quick to see that she had not. He seemed very calm outwardly ; still the surprise of seeing Barbara had naturally caused him some perturbation. Instinctively he raised his hat, and might even have passed on, but that Bab was blushing and stopping, as if expecting that she must stay to speak all against her will.

It was like a meeting between strangers, so great was the change, so marked and certain the growth on either side. It is not always that love will stand such alterations.

‘No change, no change ! Not but time’s added grace  
May blend and harmonize with its compeers.

\* \* \* \* \*

But ’tis a change, and I detest all change,  
And most a change in aught I loved long since.’

So Paracelsus spoke, nay speaks (that is the best of the friends that live between the covers of the books on our shelves ; they do not cease to speak save when we cease to listen) ; so said the suffering man to whom even the most natural changes in the life of his woman-friend were intolerable. So we say, many of us ; and as we speak we know the love is dead, the friendship cold.

But if there be a root to the matter, a true root planted rather in the rock of eternal verity than in the shifting sand of passing emotion, then no change can hurt the love so growing ; for change must mean advance, and such advance must mean an ever-increasing attractiveness. There is no security for human affection like to that which is planted in Divine love.

If men and women who are of the earth earthy be drawn to such as show that some small ray of the light that never was on sea or land has penetrated into their soul, how shall it be with such as are praying always that the same light may be vouchsafed to themselves ?

Only a few words were exchanged, and these quite commonplace ; yet the meeting was not without its effect upon the future.

‘I will go on waiting,’ Hartas said to himself as he went homeward to the Grange. And Bab, returning with heavier step to the Forecliff, said :

‘More than ever I see I was right. How he’s changed ! It’s



hardly himself! . . . A man such as he is now to marry a bait-gatherer!

Then on that painful string the sad music of her thought paused awhile. And the next variations had each one a refrain, and it was this:

'Yet, after all, will anyone ever love him more? will anyone ever be to him all that I might have been? . . . Oh me! *How I could have loved him!*'

And ever and again through all the strain of poverty and fear of want, and dread of parting, for ever came that cry, '*How I could have loved him!*'

Naturally enough no one dreamed how it was with Barbara. The painful episode in the history of the Rector's niece had drawn all attention, all speculation to itself. Few cared to remember that once upon a time the Squire's son had fallen in love with a 'flither-picker,' had suffered something that was almost death because of her; and, finally, had owed his life to her. That was the end; and it had happened months ago.

## CHAPTER LIV.

### OLD EPHRAIM.

'Weepeth he?

Some sobbing weep, some weep and make no sound.'

'ARE ya' tired, honey?—are ya' more tired nor ushal?' the old man asked, as Bab came up the slope of the Forecliff, her baby in one arm asleep and smiling, and a skepful of brash\* in the other.

Bab looked up a little wonderingly as she answered that she was not particularly weary. Words of endearment had always come from her grandfather's lips so rarely, so unreadily, that she hardly ever heard them without suspicion; and there was something more this evening—a gentleness in his intonation, a tremulousness in his voice not to be noted without alarm.

It was a May evening, somewhat chilly, as the evenings of that month are apt to be in the north of 'Merry England.' There was a cold, blue look upon sea and sky, almost a threatening look; but since the fishing-fleet of the neighbourhood was in safe shelter there was no special need for anxiety on account of the men and boys of the place who were not at home. Perhaps even a deeper anxiety might be caused by the recollection of such as had been left behind to await the news of success from those who had gone out in search of it. Not even old Ephraim could remember any year when the strain of living had been so great at Ulvstan Bight as it was now.

The affectionate words that Barbara had just heard from the old

\* Brash, a local name for the tiny morsals of coal and drift-wood that fringe the waves along the beach near to the mouths of rivers or becks.



man's lips awoke the cord that had been reverberating through the past days.

As gently and deftly as might be she gave the children their supper of bread and milk-and-water, gave each one a careful bath in the little back-kitchen, listened to each one's evening prayer, and gave to each one a last loving kiss. Then she came outside again to the stone seat where old Ephraim was still smoking in the chill, dark-blue evening light.

'You'll not have your supper out of doors this chilly night, gran'father?' she asked, sitting down beside him for a moment—not a usual thing for her to do. In those stern northern regions the deepest love seldom shows the slightest sign of love's most natural-seeming familiarity.

'Ah think Ah will, Barbarie—Ah think I will to-night.'

And again came that shiver of fear, of dread to the girl at his side.

'Just as you like, gran'father, just as you fancy,' she replied, with seeming light-heartedness; and in a few minutes the little table was in front of him, the steaming soup sending out a grateful odour.

For a time the old man enjoyed his meal in silence—no, not quite that; the art of silent feeding was one he had not heard of. Since Barbara had heard it alluded to once she had become sensitive; but her sensitiveness was not hurt this evening.

'It's good, Barbara; it's good broth, this is! Won't ya hev a drop on it?'

'No, gran'father, thank you.'

Old Ephraim paused awhile—then, with most unwonted effusion, he laid his hand upon the girl's arm, and said brokenly:

'Ah know why, honey—Ah know it all! I hev'n't watched thee all these years athoot seein' 'at thee never thinks for thyself'—no, not for a minnit—it's allus me, or the bairns, or Nan's little Ildy; or if it isn't none of us, it's somebody outside—onyhoo, it's never thyself, as a bairn might see, lookin' at thy thin white feäce. . . . An' Ah mun saäy it some time, an' that soon; so Ah'll say it noo, Ah can't beär to watch thee noä longer. Ah've kept it all back tell the varry last; an' Ah've done that for my oän säke. Ah couldn't bard noä talkin' . . . An' Ah's noän an oäd man yit—not me; why, Ah's nobbut i' my seventies! An' there was oäd Jake Moss as went to the Greenlan' Seas in his nineties! An' as for me, why Ah's nobbut just going doon by t' edge o' t' coäst an' up again! An' that just i' th' spring o' th' year, when all's as quiet as can be. . . . Te tell the treuth, Barbie, Ah's despert set o' going—*despert* set on it! Ah never thowt 'at Ah sud be, but I is. . . . Naäy, Ah was kind o' feard on't, an' had a kind o' dread o' facin' the saut water again. 'Twas rether strange, wasn't it noo? An' then all at once Ah turn'd back o' mysel', and seemed, so to saäy, craäzed o' goin'! . . . Why nowt would stop ma noo!—noä, nowt 'at Ah can think on! Ah's fair impatient for the morro' mornin'. . . . It is queer, noo, isn't it?'



‘The morrow morning!’ Barbara repeated quietly.

The old man did not see how pale she grew, how her lips whitened suddenly, how full of deep pain was the look that she fixed upon the far sea-horizon.

‘Ay, to-morro’ mornin’, honey; an’ better so! Thee can’t ha’ no time to fret!’

Then the old man laughed a long, low laugh, meant to be easy and quite unaffected, but not altogether successful.

‘Frettin’!’ he exclaimed presently. ‘Te talk o’ frettin’ about an aud salt like me goin’ fra Hildshaven to the Thames an’ back again at midsummer! Goodness gracious me! what may one live to come to?’

There was another pause—a pause that meant for Barbara a strong and stern strife. She knew—recognised most certainly—that any effort to stay the old man must end in failure. As he said, there was no danger to be dreaded; that is, none save such as must attend every man who joins the brave army of those who go down to the sea in ships.

And all such dangers he had braved long ago—braving such extreme moments as few had passed through with sufficient energy to enable them to describe their experience in detail. As Damian Aldenmede had often said, Ephraim Burdas’s life, truly written, would have been a life to rank with the most thrilling biographies of the English language.

Unfortunately there was no one at hand to write it. Barbara Burdas, his granddaughter, the recipient of his every experience, might *see* the book—see it in her mind’s eye from the first page to the last—but, happily for her, the mysteries of pen and ink were yet most elaborately mysterious.

That one should simply sit down to a desk and write some words which should afterwards be translated into print, the printed sheets be transformed into bound books, was enlightenment of the most startling kind. ‘Was *that* how books were made?’

But she was not thinking of these things on this blue, bleak May evening. Her thought was drawn to the idea of parting from her grandfather, the nominal head of the house, the nominal mainstay. After all, was it imperative that he should go?

So wondering, so hoping, so fearing, Barbara went to bed, leaving her grandfather to enjoy the rising moon, the silvery sea, the peace—the precious peace of that life in Ulvstan Bight.

By-and-by the old man went indoors; and by-and-by he too slept. The moon sailed above the Forecliff, above the sea, above a realm of quiet that seemed as if it might never be broken. And the gray dawn was quiet too—quiet and sombre and tristful. But presently there came the sound of human intrusion upon the peace of nature. Yet it was a thoroughly characteristic sound, and in keeping with the scene.

‘Ephraim Burdas, old man! where be ya? *The Land o’ the Leal* is off o’ Danesbro’ waitin’ for ya; so if ya mean to sail wiv



her as ya said—if ya've noän chänged yare mind, come along sharp! . . .'

Barbara had heard, feeling afresh the chill shivering of the previous evening as she did so; and as she dressed in haste, her every thought was a prayer. In a few minutes she was outside the cottage making inquiries of Peter Grainger as to the details of the voyage, and the probable length of it. She had not asked any of these questions before.

As she had discovered only the previous evening, and to her great pain, her grandfather's belongings were all ready. His hammock and blanket had been packed while she was out beyond the Bight at the limpet-beds—nay, she knew that for weeks past he must have been secretly and silently making his preparations. He had left no worrying or tiresome detail to irritate the last moment.

Her first instinct was to rush indoors again and dress the children; the two elder boys could dress themselves, and Ailsie could assist the smallest of the brothers. The baby took all the time Bab had to give.

'They were all outside the cottage at the last moment. Jack and Stevie were almost hilarious at the idea of their grandfather going to sea again; but little Ailsie would not respond, and hid her face in Barbara's gown and wept sorely.

'He'll noän come back, grandfather won't,' the child sobbed in whispers, not to be heard by any save Bab herself. 'He'll noän come back—no, never! I'll have to go to him! . . . He'll noän come back here again—no, never!'

## CHAPTER LV.

### A LETTER FROM THE LAKE OF THE FOUR CANTONS.

'Take back the hope you gave—I claim  
Only a memory of the same.'

ROBERT BROWNING.

'How dreary life must be at the Rectory just now!' a lady parishioner exclaimed one day to Gertrude Douglas.

Miss Douglas liked to have such remarks made to her; she was a little vain that it should be known how completely she was in the confidence of everyone in the house on the hill-top. And no one could say that she had ever betrayed the confidence reposed in her. If not altogether a wise woman, she was by no means to be classed with the foolish. And her saving grace was that she was free from all taint of malice, or evil will, or bitter recollection. She hardly knew what it was to remember an unfortunate remark. Her temperament seemed always charged to overflowing with kindness and pleasantness; and she had what certain people called a 'gift for seeing everything *couleur de rose*.' The gift is a valuable one, as well for the neighbour of the possessor as for the possessor himself.

'Dreary!' she replied to the inquiring lady in her most liquid



and musical tone. "Well, no; do you know, after all it is hardly that. They are not dreary people, either the Canon or Mrs. Godfrey."

"Oh, well," the lady replied, "a shade or two in the meaning of a word is not usually of much importance in conversation. You know what I meant. It must be a time of sadness compared with times past. Think of the life there a year ago—only last spring—the garden-parties, the tennis, the people gathered there always, some to meet the Merediths—popular people always—some to try to make out that perplexing artist—what was his name? I forget."

"Aldenmede—Damian Aldenmede. . . . There are people who set down the whole catastrophe to his account."

"So they do. . . . I never did."

"Didn't you?" Miss Douglas asked with a very clever note of indifference in her accent. "Yet there must have been a cause; don't you think so?"

"Undoubtedly," said the lady, hiding an inconvenient smile. "And that a cause not far to seek. The match between Mr. Meredith and Miss Theyn was never a likely one; the merest onlooker could see that!"

"Do you think so? Well, you *do* surprise me!" Gertrude exclaimed. And there is no doubt but that her surprise was genuine. "We—that is, all of us at the Rectory—all of us who really knew them both well, considered the engagement a most desirable one; desirable in every sense."

"Desirable, yes; but suitable, *no!*" was the emphatic reply. "And the event was proof enough that Miss Theyn saw as I saw, as others saw! . . . I have only sorrow for her—and yet no, something more than sorrow—I have admiration, hope. *She will live to be glad!*"

With this half-dubious word, Miss Douglas's interlocutor went her way, and Gertrude proceeded to the Rectory, where Mrs. Godfrey was only now engaged in the saddening task of returning one by one the whole of the numerous wedding presents sent to her niece.

When Gertrude entered the drawing-room, Mrs. Godfrey was already in tears; for the very weariness, the very deadness and flatness of the future, she could not help the tears.

"I could forget the past," she said, the hot drops streaming through her beautiful white hands. "I could forget it all if I had hope for the future. But to think of her thus, my own child, most delicately cared for from her birth; "spoiled," people said, who could not see that what they called spoiling was the very condition of her life. People talk, the newspapers write, the doctors lecture, on what is called "Infant Mortality," on the frightful "waste of human life." Does anyone who has ever brought up an infant from the birth ever cease to wonder that that "waste" is not tenfold greater than it is? It may be that it is better, in a certain sense, that it is so. If the little ones die, they cease to suffer. I have



thought thus ever since I had the care of Thorda. She was so different from other children, and as a girl she was unlike any girl I ever knew. You will understand me, Gertrude, where others would deride me, when I say she was so superior—that is not the word I want, but it will do. She was always so reserved, so dainty, had such a dread of things common, and rough, and coarse. . . . And to think of her now, a servant of servants, helping to dress the most loathsome wounds; brought face to face with the most impossibly offensive sights and sounds—oh, I cannot bear to think of it! Even her uncle, who takes what I may almost call the opposite view of the whole matter, even he has sorrow for her, though he will not admit it—not easily. Yet he cannot hide the fact that he is grieving—how should he? Having no daughter of our own, Thorda was *more* than a daughter to us. She was a blessing sent to fill the place of a blessing denied, and therefore a double blessing. And until—until that unhappy hour, she never caused us one moment's heartache. While the hours of happiness she brought to us, who shall describe them? . . . I cannot. I cannot believe that it is all over; no, I cannot. Surely one mistake cannot ruin a life—nay, more lives than one in this instance! Surely it cannot be!

Miss Douglas was not wanting. Her ready flow of sympathetic words, the musical tone in which they were uttered, were all most helpful at the moment; and when by-and-by she offered her graceful, if not very helpful or adequate services, in aid of the work of the day, or rather of the week, her presence was certainly felt to be—as usual—together desirable. As package after package was wrapped up, sealed, addressed, each with its own painfully appropriate note, Mrs. Godfrey grew more and more grateful for the help afforded her.

'It is so good of you, dear,' she said, as another parcel—a fine gold bracelet set with diamonds—was being sealed by Gertrude. 'It is so very good of you. I could not ask my maid to help me in a task like this: she is too callous; she would have driven me half wild. On the other hand, there was only my husband, who could not have helped me for the life of him. He would have broken down while sealing the first package.'

'Do you think so? Do you really think that he would?' Miss Douglas asked, not wishing to show superior discernment, but more clearly alive to the Canon's strength of will than might have been supposed.

Perhaps it was fortunate that at that point an interruption should occur. Ellerton entered the room with a letter on a tray—a foreign letter, as Mrs. Godfrey saw at a glance. She broke the seal with some trepidation.

'How strange!' she exclaimed, unfolding the thin paper. 'How very strange that this should come now! It is from Mr. Aldenmede.'

'From Mr. Aldenmede!' Gertrude exclaimed. 'Oh, do tell me



about him! Where is he? The Pyramids? The Rocky Mountains?"

'You shall know all presently, dear. The letter is dated from the Hôtel Unterwalden, Lucerne. . . . Ah, how well I know it! how well I can see it all! The blue bright lake, the blue sky, the green trees, the hotel itself glowing from top to bottom with its dazzling crimson-and-white *persiennes*. . . . And then the scenery beyond, and all around, everywhere! . . . But we shall see what Mr. Aldenmede says of it. He must be happy there!'

And truth to say the letter had touches of healing in it: the healing that comes of intercourse with Nature—Nature at her greatest and grandest.

'I have been to the Riviera,' Mr. Aldenmede wrote, 'and intend going to the North Italian lakes in a few days. I am hoping to be able to paint a picture—a lovely piece of scenery at the lower end of the Lago di Garda. My hotel will be the Cavazzola, Desenzano. If you should be moved to write, be assured that I should be most grateful to receive a letter. These May evenings are long, and lovely, and lonely. The mornings are beautiful beyond all description. Those who have only seen Mont Pilatus in "the season," when the snow has gone, and the purple shadows lie deep upon the mountains all day, can easily understand why it should usually be spoken of as "Gloomy Pilatus." But oh, that the world could see it as I see it now! Better still as I saw it this morning at four o'clock! It would need the pen of a Ruskin to do any sort of justice to it! There had been rain at Lucerne and in the neighbourhood for an entire week—the cold rain that means snow even on the lowest mountain heights. Even last night all was gray, and dead, and lowering. Judge, then, what I felt this morning when, on awakening at four, I saw instantly that the world about me was flooded with sunshine. And *such* sunshine! Before your head leaves the pillow you are dazzled, exhilarated.

'I feel paralyzed when I think of trying, by means of mere pen and paper, to give you any idea of the glorious scene that burst upon me when I stood by my window side. . . . I am not ashamed to say that I saw it first through tears.

'One hardly knew which way to look first, whether down the Lake of Lucerne, with mountains on every side, blue, snow-white, or rose-red, according to whether you happened to look left or right, to sunlight or to shade. And as for the lake itself—its intense glowing blue in the fore-front of the scene, the sparkle as of diamonds in every tiny ripple; the shore scenery, picturesque and interesting where it was near, picturesque and mystic where it was far off—how shall anyone give any idea of it in a letter! And even as I looked there began to rise from the lower end of the lake such strange, white, snowy, mysterious clouds, spreading in long lance-like lines from bay to bay, rising from peak to peak, that though I was aware of some strong attraction drawing me away to some other scene, I yet could not turn.



‘To watch those long, white clouds, glistening and shining above, under-shot with the pearliest of blue-gray tints below—to see these mists embodied, so to speak, to watch them rising against the grand peaks of the Alpine range, dissolving as they rose, turning now to pink, now to white, and then the next moment not visible at all, certainly this was a lesson in the formation of clouds. I cannot ever again look upon the sky with such ignorance as I have suffered from hitherto. This morning on Lake Lucerne was a dividing line in my life. A wall fell, and I saw beyond.

‘But not even yet have I tried to describe the one surpassing moment. Of set purpose I have refrained.

‘And yet I knew it was there, Mont Pilatus in all its glory, such glory as I am told it does not display three times in three years. So you see, I am *sometimes* fortunate.

‘Perhaps you will even discern that I am writing this letter before breakfast, under the strong impulse of the exhilaration of this glorious mountain air and scenery. Though I am by no means new to foreign travel, this moment has hitherto been unsurpassed.

‘How shall I tell you of the sight that burst upon me as I turned to the mountain on my right? “Gloomy Pilatus!”

‘From the lowest plateau, the lowest gorge on its magnificent side to the pointed rose-red, shining crown, shining far up in the white, glowing sky, Pilatus was there, every outline defined; in the highest parts defined in the softest, most ethereal, shining rose-pink, against the shining white of the sunlit clouds beyond; lower down the pine-trees, covered with snow, were outlined in pearly-gray tints upon the depth of snow behind.

‘There was snow everywhere, colour everywhere, shining, rising mist, almost everywhere. . . . But what amazed me was the fact that nowhere did there seem to be any cold.

‘Early though it was, between four and five in the morning, the people were thronging to church. The bells were ringing softly, the softer for the nearness of the water, which seems always to “liquidise” the sound; the fishing boats were gliding across the lake; people were sauntering under the chestnuts of the Schweizerhof Quai. Ah, how calm it all was, how full of peace!

‘And even yet it is peaceful. Fancy having merely to turn one’s head to see Pilatus on one side, and the Rigi Kulm on the other! And then all the snowy Alpine range between, point behind point, rising to the clouds, nay, piercing beyond them! Below the snow the dark firs come; they are everywhere, lending such a depth of purple to the distance, such soft, deep, changeful mystic purple, as no palette could give you; and below the firs the calm, still sapphire lake reflecting all. I cannot help writing it once more; everywhere there is calm, and to a soul needing this healing as mine does, the sensation fills one with gratitude, the holiest gratitude. I do not know that ever in my life before I felt so perfectly all that might be included in the words, “Peace on earth, good will to men.”



'And now that I have said all this about myself, do you not feel moved to be generous, to tell me all about yourself, and how the world seems to you, now that the world's happiest spot, your home fireside, is no longer brightened by the presence of your niece. You must congratulate yourself very sincerely on the fact that her home and yours are so near together. Will you give my kind remembrance to Mr. and Mrs. Meredith, and also to Mrs. Meredith senior.'

This latter part of the letter Mrs. Godfrey had not read aloud; and now she was glad that she had not.

For a few moments she tried to shade her tearful eyes with her hand; but Miss Douglas saw by the quivering lips, heard by the half-suppressed sigh, that pain was being endured; and well she knew the kind of pain. Fortunately she had no impulse toward attempting to relieve it.

A little later Mrs. Godfrey read aloud to her husband and to Miss Douglas some parts of the conclusion of the letter.

'If you should at any time be moved to write to me, please tell me all that you know of Barbara Burdas and her household. I have written to her, more than once, and have received one very welcome letter in reply. What a noble girl she is! Her natural instincts are so great, so unselfish; and every now and then she finds how they have been crossed by hereditary strain, how they had been injured on this hand by training, or the influence that goes for training, on the other by neglect, and all this she takes to herself for her own failing! Yet that at her age and in her position she should be alive to it all, is a most astonishing thing to me! And it is even more astonishing that she should go on gathering bait, mending nets, washing, cooking, serving by day, and yet should have the intellectual appetite to sit down and read Ruskin or Carlyle, Shakespeare or Tennyson, by night. And then her love for the children, her especial love for her little sister Ailsie, and for her friend's motherless baby: does it not show how completely her character is womanly all round?

'Yet I am not quite happy about her. How should I be? All the while, from the first day of my seeing her, I had wished to do something to alleviate her position a little; yet I dreaded with a very natural dread to interfere with what seemed to me the arrangement of a higher Power. Now, however, I have fears, and it may be time that I should step in and do what I can. Will you help me? Will you bring your finer feminine tact to bear upon a most difficult feminine problem? As to the pecuniary part, without being needlessly explicit, I may say that I can, that I shall be happy to, do whatever you may think wise.

'I need hardly say that we must work together with discretion, seeming to bestow our attention upon the children, or the grandfather. Barbara's pride is seldom in a very quiescent state. That is one of her shortcomings. She has hardly arrived at the perception of the fact that to receive a benefit from a friend grace-



fully is to have reached a high point of human training. . . . We must help her training on this head, you and I, that is if you will kindly co-operate with me. And I feel sure you will. I have written all this without once questioning your kindness.'

That was nearly the end of the letter. The Canon asked to see it after dinner, and read it through again from beginning to end, but he read it in silence. Miss Douglas was at the piano, playing some of Thorda's music, now and then singing one of her songs. . . . Perhaps it might only be in these minor matters that her intuition failed.

'This is pleasant, Milicent dear,' Hugh Godfrey said, leaning over the sofa on which his wife was resting in the dim lamp-light. 'This letter is very pleasant—for the most part—and opens up some charming ideas of life—ideas we had half forgotten. It is so long since we were abroad—so long since we saw a snow-crowned Alp! Can't we manage it—you and I?'

'And take Thorda with us? We must do that; *that* we must do.'

'And have it said that you had taken her abroad to meet Damian Aldenmede!' Miss Douglas interposed, leaving the music-stool. She had lost no word of all that had been said.

Well accustomed as Mr. and Mrs. Godfrey were to Miss Douglas and her peculiarities, much as they appreciated her manifold good qualities, there were yet moments when she occasioned them at least surprise.

Her suggestion was met with silence—a perfect but not painless silence.

With true large-heartedness the Canon turned from a difficult topic to one that at least promised easier continuance.

'We must think over what Mr. Aldenmede says of Barbara Burdas,' the Canon remarked. 'How good he is! How few men would have remembered an Ulvstan fisher-girl, and have written of her thus, while among the most perfect scenery of the Swiss Alps!'

'But how few fisher-girls would strike the chords of remembrance as Barbara does! You wouldn't speak of her in the same breath as Kirsty Verrill or Martha Thixen?'

The Canon only smiled his reply.

'You will go down to the Bight soon, dear?' he asked. 'It will be an additional grace in Aldenmede's eyes if you send him a few words at once.'

'We will go to-morrow, in the forenoon if you can, Hugh dear. You must come with me.'

'Gladly, if it be fine. But I am doubtful about the whether.'

'The glass has been going down all day, so my father said,' Miss Douglas remarked. 'And even now it looks threatening,' she added. 'Perhaps I had better go at once.'

'No, Gertrude dear. If it looks threatening—and I think it does—that is sufficient reason for your staying. There is your old



room. And they will not expect you at home when they see these clouds !

Gertrude laughed.

‘They never do *expect* me,’ she said carelessly. ‘If I am at home by ten, well and good ; if not, the doors are locked. My father is very rigid.’

## CHAPTER LVI.

### AT THE OLD HOUSE ON THE FORECLIFF.

‘Break, break, break,  
On thy cold, gray stones, O sea !  
And I would that my tongue could utter  
The thoughts that arise in me.’

TENNYSON.

As the party at the Rectory had anticipated, there was a change of weather during the night, but it was, on the whole, a less severe change than the signs had seemed to predict.

At dawn the boisterous wind went down, and with its fall the sea fell from its midnight wildness. By noonday there was nothing to prevent the most ‘weather-fended’ person from going out of doors, and consequently, at luncheon, Mrs. Godfrey announced her intention of going down to the Forecliff.

‘I am going in obedience to the request of Mr. Aldenmede,’ she said with her usual light pleasantness of manner. ‘Gertrude, you will come with me ?’

‘I ! oh *no* !’ Miss Douglas exclaimed, uttering the words with such musical vehemence, with such pretty gestures of surprise, that neither of the two who watched her were moved to trace her objection to its source. However, there was no underthought in her own mind to prevent her from disclosing the thought that was uppermost.

‘How you do such things, dear Mrs. Godfrey, I don’t know !’ she exclaimed, with that brightness of emphasis which was one of her most prominent social attractions. ‘It is all very well to care for the poor,’ she went on, quite seriously now. Miss Douglas was an artist in the lights and shades of vocal expression ; and many a struggling histrionic aspirant, struggling with a strongly-artistic inward impetus overbalanced by ignorance of all the requisite outward culture—many such might have envied Gertrude Douglas her instinct of intonation. It was strange that all inward illumination should be wanting, all spiritual inspiration denied.

‘It is all very well for one to care for the poor,’ she said quite gravely, ‘but to care for them is one thing, to endure . . . the—shall I say, for politeness’ sake the *odour* of their dwellings, is another. We are all bound to care for the common people ; whether we are bound to endure the . . .’

Miss Douglas did not finish her remarks. Her phrase, the ‘com-



mon people,' had so roused one of her interlocutors that he did not permit her to finish.

He repeated the phrase, in tones of indignation he was sorry afterward to have used to a guest.

'Common people! Why do we use that phrase?' he asked, 'or rather, why do we use it speaking only of the poor? It is so senseless! If we mean "vulgar," either in the old sense or the new, let us say so. . . . Common! I fancy we might find two uncommon characters among the very poor for one among the classes above them in possessions, in culture. Besides, there is such a terrible ring of would-be superiority in the way we use the words nowadays.'

It was characteristic that Miss Douglas only laughed pleasantly as the Canon concluded, and even while she laughed she darted most charming glances of understanding, first to Mrs. Godfrey, then toward the head of the table where the Canon sat, already half ashamed of his vehemence.

'Gertrude, you are the best-tempered girl in the world,' he said, in own generous straightforward way. 'You never take offence!

'Take offence at you!' she replied, her bright eyes just a little moistened with a tear not meant to fall. The little episode was all forgotten long before Mrs. Godfrey left her at her father's door.

'Come again soon, dear; to-morrow, if you can,' Mrs. Godfrey exclaimed, kissing her hand to the doctor's daughter as the carriage drove away. Then she sank back among her cushions, silent and lonely. She was apt to admit that her own thoughts were never very good company.

The Rectory carriage had ceased to make much sensation on the Forecliff. A neighbour or two ran out to watch the progress of the vehicle up the narrow street, the rough little lane bordered with dusty coltsfoot. Two little lads—they were Jack and Zebulon—stood at the top of the lane, and went running into the Sagged House as the carriage came; but alas for all Mrs. Godfrey's amiable intention, it was only old Hagar who came out.

'Eh, my laädy,' she exclaimed, dropping an unwonted curtsy, a rare thing on the Forecliff. 'Eh, madam, but Bab's not here. It'll be her yer wantin' for sure?'

'Yes, I was wishing to see Barbara,' Mrs. Godfrey exclaimed, leaving the carriage and going toward the door of the house. 'May I come in?' she asked with an amiable smile, and passing on in her grand, stately way. No wonder poor old Hagar was overpowered, and hardly knew what she said or did.

The cottage fire was low and gray; the fireside, which had always been so bright and clean, was heaped with dust and ashes. Wooden washing-tubs filled with dirty clothing and dirty water stood in muddy pools upon the brick floor, upon chairs, upon stools; the remains of the dinner stood in unsavoury untidiness upon the table by the window. The two boys, unkempt, uncared-for in every way, stood by the old oak bureau, looking as if they



did not understand this new order of things. Hagar was drying a sloppy chair with her apron for Mrs. Godfrey to sit upon, talking volubly all the while ; and in such evidently heartfelt accents of regret that she was already forgiven. In her own heart Mrs. Godfrey was less hard upon dirt and disorder than some who are fain to profess a greater tolerance.

'Eh, but I is sorry, I is despart sorry,' the old woman was saying. 'Bab'll never forgie ma, niver. She tell'd me so surely 'at Ah wasn't to meddle wi' no washin'; there was clean things anuff an' te spare tell she came back. So there would ha' been, but when Suze Andoe came in yesterday, an' saw as A'd nowt to do, she offered ma ninepence ef A'd wesh a few things oot for her, an' so Ah started this mornin'; an' then Suzy came in wiv her pipe an' sat an' talked, an' smooked, so as Ah couldn't get on a bit. An' here I is! Eh, what would Barbarie saäy if she could see you i' sike a muddle as this !'

It was some time before Mrs. Godfrey could make herself heard.

Old Hagar's hearing was less quick than her tongue. In answer to the inquiry of the Rector's wife as to where Barbara Burdas might have gone, a very flood of words was poured out, explaining things past, present, and to come.

First came a history of the poverty that was universal on the coast about Ulvstan, its cause, its duration, with many details quite irrelevant. Next, evidently coming somewhat nearer to the point, old Ephraim Burdas's biography was given from Hagar's first recollection to the last.

'An' when I heerd tell o' the old man's wantin' te goä to sea again, wantin' so terribly as they saäy he did, why Ah'd nobbut one thowt. Ah've heered tell on it afore, my laädy, that despart longin' 'at comes upon a seafarin' man—a longin' just *te goä one more voyage*—that's hoo they put it, or rayther hoo it's put te them. An' when they can't but goä, when noä reason 'll touch 'em, noä beggin' nor prayin' move 'em, why then folks begin to see ; an' they saäy "good-bye," knowin' 'at all's overed. . . . It was so i' this case, my laädy, in was indeed ; an' Bab knowed it. An' when the old man had fairly gone, she broke doon, an' cried as Ah'd niver seen her cry afore—noä, nut even when both father an' mother were drooned afore her eyes. She were that sure 'at she'd never set her eyes on the old man again.'

'But you say that she has gone to him, to Hild's Haven?' Mrs. Godfrey inquired, recalling to the old woman's mind an admission she had made at first.

'Ay, so she hes ; an' glad anuff she were to goä.'

'How long is it now since she went?'

'How long? Weel, let ma see! It's a week noo, more or less, sen' the letter com'—a letter fra the master, Christifer Baildon. He's part owner o' the schooner, a trader she is, tradin' atween Hild's Haven an' London. He was wantin' a extry hand this summer, as Ephraim had heerd tell, an' so they agreed ; an' Ephraim



sailed, an' had a prosperous voyage anuff tell they got back te Hild's Haven. An' just afore they landed the old man sickened all at once, an' he was that bad 'at the master wrote for Bab te goã at once if so 'twere 'at she cared te see him alive. So it were 'at she went, at a minnit's notice ; an' she'd no thought o' takin' noãn o' the bairns save Nan's Ildy ; but at the last minit little Ailsie began te cry i' that brokken-hearted way 'at Bab could niver stand. An' hearin' Ailsie, little Steve began te cry just i' the saäme fashion. Bab turned as white as a sheet. "Put 'em up a night-goon apiece, Hagar," she said ; for she was washin' an' dressin' t' infant just then. "Ah'll take 'em wi' me, them two," she went on. An' Ah daured not gainsay her. So it was she went ; an' so it is 'at Ah'me here wi' Jack and Zeb ; but Ah's despert sorry about the weshin'."

Mrs. Godfrey had listened with an interest only equalled by her patience. Till the tale was done she hardly knew how some touch of weirdness in the old woman's language and manner had affected her.

It is hardly too much to say that the Rector's wife felt as if she had been listening to the story of the going forth of some sentence of doom, a very indefinite sentence, but involving disaster.

Mrs. Godfrey was so far from being a superstitious woman that those who knew her best considered her most incredulous on any matter touching upon things unseen.

And it was no mere profession, no mere light, clever, sarcastic way of making a drawing-room full of people wonder at her ready word, or envy her strong clearheadedness. She was undoubtedly free from the awe and dread of things not comprehended that accompany some people from the cradle to the grave.

Yet at this moment, in the fisherman's cottage, she sat silent and chill, wrought upon by what might certainly have been termed 'an old wife's' tale. When it was so termed later, Mrs. Godfrey heard the accusation, and did not reply. At this moment her words were not ready ; she was silent awhile. Then she asked of Hagar, speaking in an aimless way :

'Was it wise of Barbara to take the little ones, three of them, and one an infant but a few months old ?'

'Wise, my laädy ! It were madness, just that ! An' for Bab te do such a thing—her of all others ! . . . Eh, well, there's more i' the world, *or but just outside the world*, nor we know on. An' folks can't do as they will. We noãn on us can. An' Ah'm noãn goin' te blame Barbarie, let what come on it will, Ah'll noãn saäy one word o' blaäme mysel'. . . . Ah'd be an ungraäteful wretch if Ah did, seein' all she's done for me !'

'Blame her, poor child ! Who will do that, I wonder ?' Mrs. Godfrey said, rising to go.

She had a basket in her hand with some strawberry jam for the children, and a packet or two of expensive farinaceous food for Barbara's baby, and the basket was left behind a little sadly.



Mrs. Godfrey had taken her seat in the carriage, the coachman was prepared to start, when all at once the postman came up, handed a letter to old Hagar, which the old woman took with a dropping at the corners of her mouth that touched the Rector's wife piteously.

'Stay a moment, Woodward!' she exclaimed; then, turning to Hagar, she said gently, 'Can you read the letter? Is it from Barbara? If it is, I should so much like to know what she says.'

It *was* from Barbara, as the old woman knew it must be. And it was so long since she had received any letter that she shook with dread, as she took it in her brown withered hands.

There was nothing dreadful about this epistle. It was clearly and carefully written. In writing it, Bab had wondered much into whose hands it must fall before Hagar could be made to understand its purport.

It was dated from Hild's Haven, from a small house near the quay, where old Ephraim had been received on his landing.

'He had been very ill,' Barbara wrote, 'and when I came he was not much better. Now he is quite well in health, yet not like himself, not at all. Though he is not unhappy, he has not the spirit he used to have. Often, in days gone by, I have wished he was a little bit more quiet and gentle; now I would give anything to hear him fly and snap at one in the old way. But he does not; and I think he never will again. I am so glad I brought the little ones, because he seems never tired of seeing them; and with trying to amuse them he amuses himself.'

'The people here are very good. Still it is expensive, and costs more than I have to pay with, as the Captain knows. He is very kind, and to save railway fare he is going to let me and the children come back in the schooner all the way to the Balderstone. He could have put us ashore a lot easier at Danesborough, as I pointed out to him, but being so kind, he said it wouldn't make much difference to him if he left us, so to speak, on our own doorstep. I shall never forget him for being so good to Ildy and Ailsie; and I do believe he'll be even kinder to grandfather than he was before.'

'I expect we'll be at home two days from this. That will be Friday; but whether it will be the fore part of the day or the latter part, I can't tell. We shouldn't have had this chance, but just now the *Land o' the Leal* wanted some slight repairs, which is being done here.'

'Give the little lads a kiss apiece, and tell them how it comforts me to feel so sure that they are behaving well, and especially being good to you.'

'May God bless all of you—that is the prayer made many times both by night and by day by

'Your friend,  
'BARBARA BURDAS.'



Mrs. Godfrey read the letter aloud to old Hagar, who listened, still tremulous, but inclined to be tearful.

'O' Fridaäy, laädy—you saäy she comin' o' Friday! Well, may the Lord be thanked, for I've had such dread o' my mind—such straänge dread! . . . An' you saäy old Ephraim's better, an' they're comin' back! They're all comin' o' Fridaäy! Well, well! But it is straänge!

## CHAPTER LVII.

### 'GO AND PRAY—THE NIGHT DRAWS NEAR.'

'A shadow on the moonlight fell,  
And murmuring wind and wave became  
A voice whose burden was her name.'

J. G. WHITTIER.

THAT so much of all that is hidden from the wise and prudent should be revealed unto those who are verily babes in this world's wisdom is undoubtedly a striking thing, and not easily intelligible.

To become intimately acquainted with a poor and uneducated man or woman who has passed, or, better still, is at present passing, through the deeper seas of spiritual experience, is to feel the scales falling from one's eyes—the scales of ignorance, of misconception.

If one can pass, as it were, behind the phraseology, which to some people may be so banal, so commonplace, as to be utterly unmeaning—nay, almost revolting—if one can do this—and it is not always difficult—then it is that one finds one's self face to face with that wonder, that mercy for which our Master uttered the words, 'I thank Thee, O Father!'

The inner life of David Andoe had for a long period of time been a life of struggle, of hours, nay, days of darkness, of heaviness, of almost despair.

Is it not of itself a strange thing that a man so ignorant, so utterly uncultured, unintellectual in almost every sense of the word—is it not matter for wonder that such a one should still be convinced in his own mind that somewhere, somehow to be obtained even by him, there is a state of peace, of mental and spiritual quiet; a state into which no dread of the vast unknown future can enter—the future that lies beyond the day of death—a state over which but little disquiet as to the present—this sad, troubled, wearying, worrying present—can ever prevail? Is not this assurance a strange thing, we repeat?

All the while David Andoe had had this conviction. He had even held it through one of the two most terrible tests that can come to any human being—the test of a strong, overpowering affection, broken or bereaved.

He had had but little help from without. The Zion Chapel people had not understood him altogether; and of late they had not even made pretence of greatly sympathising with him. That



a man who had been prayed with and for during a space of over two years should not yet have 'found salvation' was an almost unheard-of thing, and the cause of much doubtful speculation.

The result of all this was to throw the man more and more upon himself; and his very liveness grew more and more a terrible thing.

One thing he had for which he could be greatly thankful—he could pray. And now so long he had prayed amongst the rocks and weed-grown boulders of Ulvstan Bight that it seemed as if the place must for ever be a holy place to him. Though he did not actually put off his shoes as he approached, he yet drew near the spot in that attitude of mind symbolized by the act of uncovering the feet or head. It is for ever true that for each one of us our holy ground must be the place we have made holy by our own prayer—our own prayerful suffering.

There are other grounds holy to us, consecrated to us by the holiness, the suffering of other lives. So it is that

‘The whole round earth is every way  
Bound by gold chains about the Feet of God.’

That night was a memorable night in the history of David Andoe.

Already he had passed through an hour that he knew to be a crisis in his life—one of those hours that lie enshrined in the memory of most people who have any inner life at all. He had begun by feeling an unusual sense of darkness, of depression. His life was a failure; his sins were deep and dark beyond the possibility of forgiveness. His very prayers were unanswered; and so, doubtless, unheard. For years he had waited for a sign; and yet no shadow of a sign had been given.

But to-night, less than an hour ago, a great change had passed upon the man.

While he prayed the cloud was lifted, the cloud that had rested upon all his later life.

He could not have described the hour, or his experience of it, with any definiteness. He only knew that where all had been misery and heaviness, now there was a sense of happiness. Where darkness had been, now light reigned. The hopelessness that had crushed him to the earth was turned to a sudden lightness and buoyancy, to the feeling that enables a human being to meet on equal terms any other arbiter of the changes and chances of human life.

In one way or another, are we not each of us the determining quality of the truth or untruth of the life of some other one?

The Divine Love, moving within us like all other love that is pure and true, is for ever unselfish.

Its first thought is not ‘Am I my brother’s keeper?’ but rather this, ‘Where is my brother? Let me find him, that this my



happiness may overflow upon him; that I may have the increased happiness of feeling that his sympathy is deepening the channels of my own.'

Not consciously, not articulately do these thoughts come; nor do they bring surprise. They are part of the natural sequence of the supernatural life.

It was growing late now; and David was turning to go home when he discerned among the rocks and stones of the beach another figure, the figure of a wanderer lonely as himself. Some time passed before he knew that the wanderer was no other than Hartas Theyn.

It is quite probable that neither of these men recognised each other with perfect calmness. David was the first to speak.

'Ah'd no thought to meet you here to-night, sir!' he said with unembarrassed simplicity. But even as he spoke it struck him why it was that he had this unusual opportunity. He had not been without a touch of fear himself.

The past week had been a week of most variable weather. The wind had repeatedly risen to a gale with appalling suddenness, and then as suddenly sunk to a dead calm. This is the weather the fisherman dreads most of all, and with good reason.

More than once during the past five days the fishing-boats had had to fly with all the speed they were capable of to the nearest safe shelter.

It was thus that it happened that David Andoe was at home on a comparatively favourable night. Neither he nor his mates had trusted to the promise of the earlier evening.

'Ah'd no thought to meet you here, sir!' David began. Then presently he added, 'Yet Ah may almost say as how Ah feared it was you.'

'Feared!' Hartas Theyn exclaimed wonderingly.

'Ay, that was how Ah put it, sir!' was the reply. 'An' Ah think as mebbe ye know hoo Ah meant it—not i' noä awk'ard waäy—far fra that! . . . Naäy, to tell the trewth, it was the fear i' mysel' as was the ground o' my fearin' it was you. If one hes a bit o' oneasiness that oneasiness grows when ya know other folks is feelin' the same.'

'Then you know nothing?' Hartas asked, with deadly sinking about his heart.

'Nothin', sir. We looked for the passin' o' the *Land o' the Leal* last night. . . . An' she's never passed.'

'And you have no news?'

David hesitated a moment before replying.

'Noän to speak on, sir,' he said at last. 'The schooner left Hild's Haven.'

'You know that?'

'Yes: we know that.'

'And—and old Ephraim Burdas was on board?'

'Old Ephraim, an' Barbarie, an' the three little childer.'



Again there was silence, prolonged, painful, pregnant.

'And you say there has been no tidings at all?' Hartas inquired again, as if incredulous.

'Noän, sir—noä tidin's.'

Something in the fisherman's reply, some touch of *insouciance* mingled with sadness, awoke a feeling that was as a momentary ray of hope.

'Then what are people thinking—what are they hoping?' Hartas asked, with just a slight infusion of impatience. It was well subdued; and the quiet moonlight resting upon the wan worn features of a man yet so young betrayed how deep was the emotion at the root of the momentary absence of control.

David quite understood; and since to understand is usually to sympathise, he hastened to disclose his own view to its last outline.

'It's so, sir. They'd leave Hild's Haven last night—there's noä doobt o' that! An' then, as it's reckoned, about three hours or so efter they left the harbour mouth a squall swept up, an' two fishin' boats as was enterin' Hild's Haven was both upset on the bar, an' one man was droonded—only one oot o' seven, but he'd a wife an' five little childer at home, an' another expected. That other was born at midnight, so I've just been told, an' half an hour later the dead body o' the father was carried into the same room; they'd nobbut one, so they could do no other. . . . Ah'd just been thinkin' o' that woman, sir, she's under thirty yet—a young woman—so te saäy; and five bairns aboot her bed, a new-born bairn in her arms, an' the dead body of as fine a fellow—as fine, an' tall, an' stoot a fellow as ya ever saw—he mun be lyin' close by the bed somewhere. Yes, I was thinkin' on it all, sir, an' hoor ago, an'—I've no shame i' confessin' it—I was prayin' as God would help *her*—help her specially, so to speak, durin' the two or three daäys to come. . . . I was strangely drawn to dwell upon the moment when they'll bear that man's body away fra the woman's sight an' side. . . . Good Heaven Hoo *will* she bear it?'

All the while Hartas Theyn stood, his pale face uplifted in the moonlight, and silence, a desire for silence, written in his every feature. . . . He spoke at last.

'And you say that squall came on after the *Land o' the Leal* had left Hild's Haven?'

'Yes, a good bit efter, maybe a couple o' hours. . . . But Ah'd not argue the worst fra that; noä, nor a good bit off the worst. The schooner was—she is a tidy little thing, a real Hild's Haven bottom, an' well set up wi' gear. . . . She'd meet the squall; I'm feared there's noän much room for doubt at she would meet it, but it 'ud be as nowt, bless ya, as nowt at all to a trim little craft like that wi' two such men on board as Christifer Baildon an' Peter Grainger. An' they've been blown oot o' their waäy, there's little doubt o' that. *My* idee is this, they've gone further oot to sea than they reckoned o' goin', that is just when the squall was on, an' soä they've been blown past—I mean to saäy past the Bight o' Ulvstan,



where they meant to stop for a few minutes so as to land *Barbarie* an' the little uns. . . . So as you see, sir, there's no need to fear 'at any ill has befallen 'em. Noän at all! Why Ah doän't feel a bit down'd mysel', an' they say i' the Bight that Ah's one o' that sort 'at's quicker to see trouble nor happiness. . . . Well, mebbe it is soä, happiness being so scarce in a man's life!

Hartas Theyn had never been without human understanding of a certain kind of human grief. Now his one fierce anticipation of trouble apart, he was yet concerned for the trouble, past and present, of this soul so near his own, yet so far away.

If one had time and space to put the matter clearly it would be easy to show how the change, the crisis, in David Andoe's soul wrought a way into the soul of the man who had been what the world about them counted 'a rival.'

In this hour they were as brothers—brothers newly acquainted, seeing and glad to see the touches of relationship on either hand.

There was no gushing; few words of any kind attested the emotion that was swaying the heart of each.

David Andoe's last word touched Hartas to the core of his soul. It was not a word of complaint, still less of reproach, but it betrayed the man's life-long struggle with loneliness, with misery, with hopelessness. Rebuke was not present, either in word or tone, and it may be that for this very reason self-reproach struck more keenly to the heart of the Squire's son. A word, a mere word, would at one time have aroused to the uttermost the antagonistic spirit so strong within him; but though even that word was now unuttered his conscience was not quiet.

'It is difficult to speak of these things,' he said, resting his hand upon a big boulder overgrown with the dark brown wrack, and still wet with the receding tide. The smell of the salt weed was about them everywhere; the moonlight poured its silvery tide over the top of the black headland that was the northern bound of *Ulvstan Bight*; there was a rippling, quivering stream of light stretching out across the waters of the German Ocean, and here and there the same light was dropping deep reflections into the pools that were between the tall dark masses of fallen rock. Here, if anywhere, might a man be moved to deliver himself of any painful or perilous aggregation lying deep under the surface of his soul.

'It is difficult, it would be as painful to you as to me, if I were to say all I would wish to say,' Hartas Theyn had begun. And David Andoe discerned the signs of effort, the pallid face, the quivering lip, the quick, short-coming breath.

'It isn't easy to say all one would like to say,' the Squire's son began in reply to David Andoe's last remark. 'I've thought of you often of late, and specially when I've had trouble of my own. . . . It's then one begins to think of other folks, to wonder if one's injured them in any way. An' I've not been without fear, not by no means. . . . Still, let me say this for myself, I never meant to



injure no man. When I first knew I cared for her—for Barbara Burdas—she was a little child, a hardworking, thoughtful, winning child—you couldn't look at her as she lifted her basket of bait up the rough steps of the rocks, but you were drawn to look at her again; maybe to smile because she was such a little thing, so small, so gentle, and had set herself to such big efforts. But she usually did all she had marked out for herself to do; and any chance assistance was not acknowledged too graciously. The very root of her nature is independence. . . . But I am wandering away from what I meant to be the point—my one fear lest you should think I had done something to turn *her* affection away from you. . . . Will you believe. . . .

'Stop, sir!' David Andoe interposed solemnly, and as he spoke a great gray cloud swept up over the moon; the waters seemed to quiver more coldly under the shadow. The moment was dark, and chill, and heavy with unaccustomed heaviness.

'Will you stop, sir?' David begged. 'An' let *me* say a word, first of all a word o' confession. Ah've not been without feelings o' bitterness toward you, naäy, mebbe o' worse nor that; but Ah've generally prayed again' all such till they've been a bit softened. . . . An' now all such is done awaäy—ay, done awaäy for iver! . . . Ah can see it all so plain. Bab's never cared for me, not i' that way; an' *Ah do firmly believe, sir, as she never would.* So you see, accordin' to my oän showin' Ah've no cause o' bitterness toward you. An' Ah'm glad, right down glad to hev a chance o' sayin' so; an' somehow, Ah can hardly tell why, Ah'm glad at that chance has come to-night.'

Hartas held out his hand; the fisherman grasped it warmly, silently. There was no need of words of assurance.

So they parted that night, not knowing how they were to meet again.

## CHAPTER LVIII.

### 'UPON THE WAVE-EDGED SAND.'

'What is to-day that we should fear to-day?  
A morrow cometh which shall sweep away  
Thee and thy realm of change and death and pain.'

CHRISTINA ROSSETTI.

It is strange to note how sometimes a rumour will creep, and grow, and spread, passing so slowly as to lose all zest in the passing. While another rumour, perhaps not more startling and important, will all at once spring to its position as an absorbing and overwhelming topic. The latter was the way in which fear as to safety of the *Land o' the Leal* spread through Ulvstan Bight and the neighbourhood. All at once, so it seemed, the very darkest views were taken. And nothing came to relieve the darkness.



David Andoe had firmly and fully believed in the theory he had put before Hartas Theyn as to the schooner's possible chance of safety. No, one else believed in it much.

The general impression, the one that had started into life so suddenly on the morning following the meeting of the two men on the scurr, was one of fear so strong and overpowering that it amounted to certainty.

Accustomed as the people of Ulvstan Bight were to storm and wreck and every kind of sea-wrought disaster, there was yet a new and appalling element in the impression caused by the loss of the *Land o' the Leal*.

It was not new that a woman should suffer shipwreck, that children should suffer with her ; the annals of Ulvstan Bight were saddened by many records of whole families going down together, the mother with the babe in her arms ; the father clasping his infant son ; but that a girl not yet twenty, a girl known and admired as Barbara Burdas had been, should perish with the child of her adoption, her own little brother and sister suffering at the same time and in the same almost mysterious way, was harrowing to a degree not surpassed by any catastrophe that had occurred within living memory. From the moment when rumour first began to stir, it darkened the daily life of the place ; and conviction put as it were a drag to the wheels of existence. During those hours if a man neglected his work it was considered a sufficient excuse if he declared that he could not occupy himself as usual with such a deadly certain uncertainty hanging over the place.

Once let the smallest sign be given, were it but washing up of the name-board of the *Land o' the Leal*, or anything known surely to have belonged to the schooner, then anxiety would be at an end, emotion would die sadly and slowly down.

But no sign was given. Another morning broke, the day was gray and cold upon land and sea—no storm awoke the echoes that slept in the caves of the dark cliffs. The sea stretched from point to point, not calm, but with a sad, restless stirring ; the waves broke upon the land in a hopeless monotone, falling, spreading, sinking slowly back. At nightfall, when the gray changed to deeper gray, the wind rose a little, wailed along the beach with a hollow sigh that now and then sounded like a moan ; but as the darkness deepened the night wind dropped again, yielding place to a deep and strange silence, broken only by the plashing of the far faint wavelets. It was difficult for anyone watching them not to feel as if here at least Nature's sympathy were his. If there were no understanding anywhere else, at least there was understanding here ; there was no mockery in the wind's sigh, no incredulousness of pain in the ceaseless *adagio* of the breaking and falling waves.

During a portion of this time David Andoe was with the fishing-boats to the north of Danesborough. He made no inquiries of anyone as to the fate of the *Land o' the Leal* — there was no need for any ; the disappearance of the little vessel was talked of every-



where. If he could have forgotten, if his aching heart might have ceased for awhile from its aching, there was no opportunity. And his mates knew how it was with him; they understood why at nightfall he sat looking out from the bow of the clumsily-built little fishing craft, gazing with all intensity across the wide seawaste before him. What was he looking for? What did he expect to see? It was well known that the missing schooner had not carried even the smallest boat.

Often he thought of, often too he prayed, for another watcher. Even there out at sea, he had heard from a little fisher-lad of Ulvstan Bight how the Squire's son had never left the edge of the cliff, but walked there, watching and wandering precisely in the same manner as others, less than a year ago, had watched wearily for him. They had never spoken of that time, the father and son, but each had it in recollection; and it was a memorable fact that since then not once had any word of bitterness or anger disturbed their intercourse. The change in Hartas was great; but the change in the Squire was perhaps the more striking if rightly understood; the old acerbity seemed dead within him—where he could not agree, he was silent; where he could not admire or sanction, he would not see.

The most curious change of all was in his attitude to his younger daughter; yet this had hardly been noticeable till after the 'catastrophe' at the Rectory. The Squire heard of his elder daughter's flight in silence, with much perplexity. He had never understood her, never seemed to wish to do so; but Miss Chalgrove had always held a private opinion that his indifference to his elder daughter, if not exactly feigned, was yet not a real thing, and her opinion was strongly confirmed by the manner in which the Squire bore the tidings that came to Garlaff that snowy day. He spoke no word concerning them; and when at last he spoke of other things there was a marked alteration in his voice and accent—it was as if some life had gone out of him, as if some cherished idea had suddenly died in his heart. And it was from that hour that he had seemed to draw his youngest child nearer to him, that he began to betray signs of uneasiness if at any time she were out of his sight for a longer while than usual.

It was to Rhoda alone that he spoke of the trouble that had fallen upon Hartas, of the way in which the young man was delivering himself over to a useless-seeming and most weary wandering to and fro on the cliffs by the sea.

'Let him alone,' the Squire said, in answer to Rhoda's wish that her father would try the effect of persuasion. 'Let him alone. I know what it is. He's better there watchin' so long as there's a ray of hope alive in him; he'll see when there's no more use i' hopin'.'

'He'll be out of his mind by that time,' said the brusque Rhoda.

'Not he,' was the father's reply. 'There never was a mad Theyn yet; the first won't be Hartas.'



So it came to pass that Hartas was left alone to wander to and fro from Saxby Head to Penstone Point, a range of some twelve or fourteen miles of rugged coastline. Now he slept for a few hours in a cottage here, or stayed for a meal at some roadside inn there, or rested for a brief time by the fireside of some stray farmhouse perched upon the edge of the barren cliff. People began to know him, to question each other, and by-and-by the true reason of his wandering spread. Many of the people who listened had heard the story of his own escape, and were interested in seeing him on that account alone. Others were more drawn by the idea of his present hopeless search; for hopeless it was acknowledged to be now, since so long a time had gone by since the little schooner should have passed by Ulvstan Bight, leaving her 'passengers' at the extreme point of the Balderstone.

As a matter of course poor old Hagar and the two little lads were not left alone with their fear and their sorrow in the Sagged House. The Rector and his wife went there frequently, seldom finding the old woman alone. All the Forecliff would have been glad to help in such a case as this.

More than once Hartas had called as he passed, drawing the boys to his side, offering them his knife as a present, letting them look inside his watch as an enjoyment, but doing all this with hands that trembled before the children, for were they not Barbara's brothers, her own especial care? Had she not lavished upon them such love as he had been glad to know, aye, even the shadow of such great love? The little fellows were commonplace enough, stupid rather than rough, inanimate rather than rude; but the younger of the two had a decided resemblance to Barbara—a resemblance to be found mainly in the deep blue-gray eyes, which had in them a certain promise for the future. The lad would never be a clever man in any sense of the term; and to his life's end it would be an easy matter for the veriest fool to impose upon him. Yet there was capability of a kind, capacity for being mildly good, quietly inoffensive. Hartas was drawn to this small brother of Barbara's. If . . . if the worst should be, he would be a father to the little lad.

'If' the worst should be! There was not another soul now in Ulvstan Bight or the neighbourhood but did not consider the worst a foregone conclusion.

And still Hartas walked there. The days had no names for him—no dates. He only knew that now it was light—now dark; and that always the great gray sea was void to him, having on its surface no trace of the sign he watched to see.

What did he dream of seeing?

He did not know, not any more than David Andoe knew. These men were each of them too well acquainted with the ocean and its disasters to dream that *now* the *Land o' the Leal* might come in sight, her sails set, her colours flying, signalling to any who might be watching for her return, 'I have been blown out to sea!'

This, so easily brought to pass in a work of fiction, could, even as



an idea, only have raised a smile on the lips of anyone living by the shores of Ulvstan Bight. Yet they continued to watch—some fitfully and at intervals; one, only one, quite ceaselessly. He would remain till some sign came to him, telling him that his watch was ended.

He knew now that it was nightfall again—and he knew that his heart was beating more faintly, his hope sinking till it might as truthfully have been called despair!

The sun had sunk into the sea, a faint pale gold orb of light into a rippling expanse of pale gold water. There was not a sail in sight, not the thinnest line of smoke to darken the gold and gray of the sky.

Though the evening was so clear, so transparent, yet not to Hartas Theyn alone, but even to others, there was the touch of sadness upon it. It was as the eve that comes before some day of trouble, of deep pain.

And as the darkness grew, the deathlike stillness seemed to grow also. It was a solitude that brought no peace to the solitary man who yet went to and fro upon the cliff-top; nay, rather did it seem as if the trouble at his heart was stirred to a fresh pain—a keener sense of agony!

‘To think of all ending *thus!*’ he said to himself—again and again he said it. ‘To think of all ending so—in darkness, in mystery, in ignorance, in suspense. Was there ever such suspense before? Was there ever? Every hour is a lifetime—a lifetime of agony!’

‘Is there *no* hope—none, nowhere?’

Then thought failed him while imagination dwelt once more, or tried to dwell, upon some last dread possible scene; the scene that might have happened, nay, that must have happened, as he now saw, on that night when the schooner encountered the squall not more than an hour or two after leaving Hild’s Haven. The most hopeful people had admitted long ago that the end had come then.

All the while the light was fading, the waves gently rising and falling; and, as he had done before, Hartas went down to the beach to walk by the water’s edge. There, if anywhere, would be found some token—a plank of wood, a portion of a rudder, a strip of sail, or—or some other thing! Hartas hardly dared to dwell upon the possibilities that thrust themselves before his mind’s eye. He was now searching for all he dreaded most to find.

He went down the cliff by a narrow but little-used and difficult path; indeed, it only led to a farmhouse in the hollow by Balders bank. There was just light enough for him to discern the steps cut in the clay, a bit of rude railing here and there in dangerous parts.

At one turn, to his surprise, he came upon a little lad, a child of not much more than five or six summers, who was laboriously climbing the steep steps, a big lump of brown tangle in one hand, a scarlet something trailing from the other arm.



‘Late for you to be down here, young man, isn’t it?’ asked Hartas of the little fellow, who looked up in silent stupidity, making no effort to answer.

Then there was a pause—a shock—an effort.

‘What have you got there? What is it?’ Hartas Theyn asked at last, touching (as one touches the cover that is upon the bed where someone is taking a last rest) the scarlet shawl that the child carried.

It was a very noticeable shawl—being made of crochet-work, and having a wide white border, with some black at the extreme edge of that.

The little fellow began to whimper.

‘I fund it—I did. ’Twere lyin’ on the sands,’ he said almost tearfully. ‘An’ there weren’t nobody there—no, not nobody.’

‘Tell me whereabouts you found it,’ Hartas asked, resting a reassuring hand upon the child’s shoulder. ‘Where have you been?’

‘Doon there—aside the wather.’

‘And this was lying upon the sands?’

‘Ay, sir. . . . ’Twere nobbut just oot o’ the wather’s edge.’

Hartas Theyn felt himself growing suddenly weak, as one stricken by illness. Only by determined effort could he keep sufficient power to will and to do.

Not so long ago, wandering one night about the Forecliff, he had seen Barbara Burdas standing at the cottage door, the red shawl thrown carelessly round her, her strong sweet face uplifted as she stood watching the silver clouds that were flying past a wan moon. That was the last that he had seen of the shawl that was in his hand now, still wet with the salt sea-water, still smelling of the salt sea-wrack.

‘Go home, my little man, go home,’ Hartas said, speaking more gently and tenderly than he knew.

Then, moving as one in a dream, he went rapidly down to the beach, expecting (if indeed he expected anything at all) only to be mocked by the exceeding nothingness to be found there.

The child had pointed to a spot a little to the northward, and at once Hartas set his face that way. The daylight was gone from the land, yet out over the sea there was a soft silvery afterglow, and there, against the silver light, was a dark outline, the outline of a large mass of something that was lying upon the beach. With beating heart and brain he still went onward.

He could never afterwards recall that moment when he first recognised that the darkly-outlined ridge was the upturned hull of a wrecked vessel. Quite black, quite lone, quite still, the hull rested upon the scaur to the north of the Balderstone, the dark line of the keel crossing a bar of silver in the sky.

Still nerving himself, he went on. He would assure himself of the truth—of the worst that might be true—before he yielded to the longing that was overcoming him—the longing to care no more,



to strive no more, to suffer no more, to lie down and die upon the wrack-strewn scaur.

Then for awhile the afterglow that was in the heavens seemed to increase in intensity. Hartas Theyn was nearer now to the wreck of the schooner, and in the dim light it loomed as the remains of some large ship had done.

The stern of the vessel was toward the sea ; and Hartas went round among the slippery pools and the weed-hung stones among which the white-edged wavelets were lashing sadly. Quite near he came—his eyes seeming to throb and burn in his head, his heart to beat as if it must burst within him ; for by this time the tide had turned and the water was rising rapidly. If there had been anyone in danger before, that danger was increasing with every second.

It was, as he had known all the while, the schooner in which Barbara and the little ones had sailed—the white letters on the black name-board attesting the fact. The inscription was, of course, upside down, but he did not need to read the words letter by letter.

*The Land o' the Leal : Hild's Haven.*

This was what he saw ; and then for awhile he saw no more. The temporary oblivion was most merciful.

## CHAPTER LIX.

### ANOTHER SEA-STORY.

'They know not that its sails are filled  
By pity's tender breath ;  
Nor see the angel at the helm  
Who steers the Ship of Death.'

J. G. WHITTIER.

If any member of the Psychological Society were desiring new ground for his interesting researches, it is probable that he could not do better than betake himself to the remote corners of the North Riding of Yorkshire. There are nooks in the dale country, there are fishing villages yet uncontaminated by railways, where investigations might be made, perhaps with results surprising to the most vividly expectant. Legends and traditions not only linger there, but are held with a vitality that is most instructive to the true student of humanity ; and as a field for the study of comparative folk-lore it is probable that this remote corner of the earth might be found to repay real research far better than others that are far more known.

Not altogether 'idle tales,' not altogether 'old wives' fables,' are these brief dramas that pass from lip to lip, from age to age. There are those who assert that Homer himself was but a singer of songs



Inspired by the traditions of his own day. Do we take the less account of him for that ?

Yes, it is intensely interesting to know that one song, one story, one heroic tale, has gone the round of the whole wide earth like some gossamer circle, binding race to race here, throwing light upon the customs and beliefs of other races there. This is no place to enter upon the fascinating theme ; yet it was impossible to avoid it altogether, since during those days of anxiety in Ulvstan Bight it was asserted everywhere that the spectre-ship had been seen crossing the Bight, not only once or twice, but assuredly the third fatal time. And after that, who should doubt ? Who should dare to doubt ?

That a ship—a tall, phantom-ship, with white, wide-spread sails—should pass thrice across the Bight before any especial disaster, was a superstition believed in by all the older people of Ulvstan ; and the younger ones seldom expressed any open disbelief.

When old Hagar Furniss spoke of her vision of the night to the Rector of Market Yarburgh, she was met with neither rebuke nor ridicule.

‘I saw it, sir, the Death-ship ; I saw it wi’ my oän eyes !’ the old woman declared. ‘An’ ’twas noä dream. I’d been asleep—ay, I’d slept for hours, so that it must ha’ been near midnight. An’ when I wakkened there was a straänge leet at the winda—a straänge breet leet ; an’ I sprung oot o’ bed an’ went to the winda side. An’ there it were, sir, *the Death-ship*, sailin’ past wiv all her sails set, an’ every sail like a sheet o’ spun glass. An’ on she went, glidin’ by as never no ship went yet upon the saut-sea watter. . . . An’ then Ah knew ’at all were overed ; ’at old Ephraim were tossin’ doon i’ the dark sea-tangle ; ’at Barbarie an’ her three little bairns were where they couldn’t look upon the light o’ daäy. . . . And ’twere all past in a minnit or two. There were nought left save the sea an’ sky, an’ a dismal wind wailin’ i’ the winda where the leet had been. . . . ’Twere all overed then, an’ then I knew.’

‘And this was last night—Monday night ?’

‘’Twere last night, sir,’ the old woman replied sadly and seriously. ‘I’d not much hope before—I’ve noän noo.’

Canon Godfrey stood thinking. He recalled to his mind the lifelong influence in such matters that must have given strong colouring to Hagar’s expectation. The legend of the spectral ship was, as he was well aware, cherished in almost every quarter of the globe. And remembering the poor old creature’s intense and affectionate anxiety during the past few days, he felt as if he himself, in her place, might also have persuaded himself that he had seen the vision.

Not for one moment did he accuse her of deceitfulness, of misrepresentation. Some ship or ships she had seen, some white-sailed vessel gliding from mist to mist across the summer night ; and her mind, apprehensive by reason of her dread, had doubtless construed the impressive and unusual natural into the dread supernatural.



He could not reason with Hagar ; instead, he tried to comfort her.

‘There are no tidings,’ he said. ‘But you must not forget what strange things have happened, even of late. It is not so long since the *Swallow* was blow quite across to Norway, and no news came for over a week. More recently still, the two fishing-boats belonging to the Graingers were lost in a squall ; one came floating into the Bight half filled with water. Two days later the nine men, who were being mourned for so passionately, arrived by a late train. As you know, they had been picked up far out of their way by a passing steamer. . . . What should hinder but that some such deliverance should have been wrought now ?’

The poor old woman could only stand silent, shaking her head negatively ; deep in her heart was the conviction that her sorrow was that of those who sorrow for the dead. And she did not err.

It was on that same night, but a few hours later, that Hartas Theyn, recovering from a temporary oblivion, found himself leaning upon the sea-wet side of an upturned ship. There were tears on his face ; in his agony he had wept aloud ; but to his astonishment—nay, to his appalling—there came an answer to his weeping. It was an answer that smote him to a strange and sudden coldness. As he leaned upon the hull he heard a distant and passionate, yet faint, knocking within, on the cabin end of the hull. He listened, unbelieving, yet again the knocking came.

In answer to it he cried—he cried aloud. But he could not be sure that he was heard. He listened, he went round the vessel and cried again, and listened again, yet he could hear no answer. But again the knocking came—twice, thrice repeated in the same feebly impassioned manner ; and Hartas Theyn took up a stone and beat a loud and long reply upon the blackened side of the little ship.

Good God ! was it possible that any human being could be alive there—inside a ship that had been tossing upside down by night and by day upon that stormy waste of waters ? If *one* were alive it was a strange, a miraculous thing !

Hartas Theyn was not a seafaring man, and he did not all at once realize his position. He hoped to do something, to accomplish some rescue, some deliverance immediately. Not one glance or two at that stoutly-built schooner, upturned there on the rocky shore of the North Sea, showed him all his helplessness.

And moment by moment that far, faint, entreating sound went on. It was as if someone were crying in low, despairing tones, saying : ‘There is one here dying, dying ! . . . Will you make *no* effort—*none* ?’

Again Hartas Theyn beat out his reply, again he cried his willingness, his intense desire. And a sound came from within that was as the sound of a human voice, but whether of man, of woman, or of child he could not tell.

And even as he stood there the leaping of the white water about his feet awoke him to a fresh horror. The tide was rising. Within



an hour or two this wrecked hull would be floated off again : floated out to sea with its burden of human life—despairing, appealing human life.

He had no precedent to guide him in such a case as this. Wrecked ships had washed ashore, upturned and not upturned ; drowned men had washed up, and men exhausted, yet not drowned ; but that a hulk should come to land, turned upside down, and so every entrance to its interior closed while yet there was life inside, was an occurrence of unexampled horror. What *might* be done ?

'*I can do nothing alone !*' he cried, putting his mouth to a plank that he fancied had 'started' a little, and so might afford some ingress for the sound of his voice. 'I can do nothing alone. . . . There is no time to be lost ! . . . The tide is coming up. . . . I will go and get help—a man or two who will help me to cut a hole in the hull ! . . . Keep quiet ! . . . Have courage ! I won't be a second longer than I can help !' So Hartas Theyn shouted, sentence by sentence, and at the last there was a pause. 'Knock again, if you can !' he begged. 'Give three knocks !'

And the three knocks came—low, full of effort, eloquent of pain.

A strange thrill shot through Hartas Theyn as he heard them. He could not think—he dared not. One more word of encouragement he sent back, hoping only that it might be heard ; then with swiftest footsteps he went back to the Bight.

He was breathless when he reached the little town. It was midnight ; not a light in a window was there to guide him. Yet he found the house where David Andoe lived ; and, to his extreme satisfaction, he found that David had come over from Danesborough to spend the night. He often did so, more for the sake of being present at the prayer-meeting in Zion Chapel than for any other reason. Whatever the cause to-night, he was glad to be there to answer Hartas Theyn's sudden and impetuous demand.

He had opened the door of the cottage at once, and stood there dressing himself hastily in the starlight as he listened to the strange story that Hartas had to tell. David was quite quiet and very pale, yet he did not lose a second.

'I'll get Fossgate and Joe Ganton, carpenters, both o' them, wi' their tools ready i' the skep. . . . Come on, sir ; i' every few minutes means a few inches more o' watter !'

It might be a quarter of an hour later when some six or seven men surrounded the hull of the *Land o' the Leal*. There was now no more fear that all human help that could be of avail would not be given. Yet those who best understood had most dread.

The tide had risen inevitably, and to a fearful-seeming extent. By the time the little band of men came to the upturned vessel, it was already floating.

David Andoe, making a desperate dash at a moment while the waves were receding, managed to reach the hull, to hold on to it, and to offer some slight assistance to Hartas Theyn, who had instantly followed him.



As the next wave went back three more men, each with some powerful or useful tool in his hand, managed to reach the wreck ; and as they clung there, trying to make some arrangement among themselves as to the best method of proceeding, again the knocking was heard—that far, faint pleading sound that struck upon the ear of each one who listened as only sounds from inside some vault or grave could have done. There was for these men much the same surprise, much the same horror, as they had felt on hearing some cry from below the churchyard sod. Yet they thanked God audibly that the sound could still be heard.

‘While there’s life there’s hope of life,’ David Andoe concluded ; and no more time was wasted in words. The men set to work, one and all, hacking, hewing, with passionate vigour. Besides their knowledge of the construction of the vessel, of the position of the one cabin where alone anyone might be and live, they had also the oft-repeated but fainter-growing sounds to direct them. This told them that they were not really far from the hand that was making that pitiful and most beseeching appeal. Yet for all their effort they were not too sanguine.

To those who know nothing of the building of even the smallest ship, it must seem as if it should have been an exceedingly simple and easy thing to make entrance through the side of a little coasting schooner. The boring of a worm can cause a leak to spring in the hull of a huge West-Indiaman. A sudden touch upon a rock will make opening wide enough for the entrance of water sufficient to sink the largest vessel afloat. How strange it seems that half a dozen men must bend their utmost effort for some time to cut a space wide enough for the egress of a living man or woman.

Some man or woman ! To the last moment Hartas Theyn would not let himself think. To think would, inevitably, be to hope. A hope only born to die is one of the bitterest hopes the human heart can hold. It seemed to him that he already felt the touch of the bitterness to be.

## CHAPTER LX.

### IN THAT SAD NIGHT.

‘Yet it may be that death  
Shall give my name a power to win such tears  
As would have made life precious.’

STILL they wrought there, making efforts more and more passionately earnest with each minute that went by. Only now and then that low knocking came, just to guide them, as it were, to where that terrible suffering was being endured. Very terrible it must be, as they knew, whether the sufferer were man, woman or child.

They did not talk much, these desperate men. The rising tide, rising rapidly, caused a perpetual rush and swish of water. All the while it was advancing, receding, advancing yet farther. And the



wind was increasing a little, wailing among the dark rocks, adding to the ripple that was upon the water, lending a certain sadness and wildness to an hour that was sufficiently sad. No man there had known an hour so strange before.

It was past two o'clock when the clouds swept away from the waning moon. It gave but little light, being shrouded from time to time with the gray scud that was flying over the heavens. When it was freest a broad amber halo was seen to surround it, always an ominous sight to the fishmen of the north.

Pallid as was this light, it was welcome—most welcome to the men there on the upturned hull, riving, striving, rending most strenuously among the close-grained planks. They knew what they were encountering. They had not now to learn the strength and toughness of 'a Hild's Haven bottom,' 'the best and stoutest bottoms used in England,' so Dibdin had declared many a long year before. And more than one story of the tenacity of ships built at Hild's Haven passed through the minds of these men who were spending themselves in that work of deliverance.

Can it be realized that some hours had passed before any opening had been made that could be called an entrance? All this while Hartas Theyn and David Andoe had wrought side by side.

'And all the time I was feeling as if every stroke of my hatchet was striking down what was left of the barrier that had existed between him and me,' Hartas Theyn confessed after. 'I couldn't understand it. It wasn't *my* doing. . . . There was something about him, a sort of gentleness, a sort of tender-hearted kindness and humble-mindedness, as if he were wishing, all the while, to do something for me. He watched me every time I moved, saved me when I slipped, helped me when I climbed, and, as I recognised later, tried to make the night easier for me than it was for anybody else. When I remonstrated, he reminded me of what I had gone through myself, and not so long before.

'An' you're not as we are, sir,' he added. 'We're used to the night, an' the sea, an' the wind, an' to hardship o' every sort. It's nought to us—that is, the exposure's nought. But I reckon we've noän on us knowed nought of a piece o' work like this—noä, nought like this. . . . God grant they may noän of 'em know nought like it again.'

And all the while, as the men wrought desperately there, the waning moon went sailing to the land ; all the while the wind was rising, all the while the waves were advancing and falling and tossing. At last the fears that had been growing in the hearts of the men at work there took on expression.

'What were we thinking on—what *could* we be thinkin' on never to bring a boat, never to fetch noä boat !'

It was David Andoe who asked the question ; and the time was somewhere about three in the morning. The same question had been in the minds of the other men ; they had needed courage to



put it into words. More and more they had needed it as the necessity for asking it became evident.

The hull had been floating some time—*now* it was drifting out to sea ; drifting with all its burden of life ; its two-fold burden—within and without.

‘I’ve knowed it all along,’ Joe Ganton said calmly. ‘I’ve seen how it would be.’

‘But you can swim, can’t you, Joe?’ David Andoe asked.

‘Ay—if Ah seed any good ‘i swimmin’.’

‘Then you’re waitin’ to be asked? This isn’t the time for it. Swim ashore as quick as you can, an’ fetch the first boat to be had for love or money, never mind which.’

This was not a difficult matter, but it took time, a longer time than had been foreseen. And it was time passed in pain of various kinds ; for faster and faster the ship was drifting out to sea, still upturned, still bearing its burden of life. But a new strain was added to the tension of the hour. There was no longer any response from the interior of the hull, and finding this there was no heart there but sank to a lower depth than it had known before. Hartas Theyn felt that the tools in his hand were now all but useless, and even David Andoe knew that he was becoming unnerved. Yet they strove on ; and to good purpose.

‘Work away, mates,’ David Andoe begged. ‘In another quarter of an hour we’ll be able to enter the hull, some of us.’

‘Joe’ll be here wi’ Arklam’s boat i’ less nor that,’ was the reply of Will Hewitt.

But both men were mistaken in the matter of time. The moon was forty minutes farther on her way when at last an entrance was effected into the cabin of the *Land o’ the Leal*.

Few words were spoken.

‘Go you in,’ David Andoe had said to Hartas, when at last it was possible for anyone to enter. And as he spoke David struck a match and lighted a tiny lantern that had hung at his belt. ‘Go you in. If she be livin’ she’ll be glad to see you.’

Hartas Theyn, white, nay pallid, between the light of the dim lantern and the waning moon, looked into David’s face for one hesitant moment. A thousand thoughts passed through his overstrained brain.

The task was not without difficulty—not without danger—this he knew ; and this it was decided him to accept the offer made in all generosity. David Andoe would have been glad to go down into that dark depth himself, and he had done it with greater facility than could be claimed by the man who went.

He went with a prayer on his lips. The hull was beginning to toss a little wildly and awkwardly in that dark sea. And he knew there were no means of guiding or steadying it in the slightest degree.

And there was yet no sign of the much-wished-for boat. Hartas turned to look out across the dark surging water as he took the



lantern in one hand, steadying himself by grasping the newly-chipped edges of the planks with the other.

'Put yer foot there,' David Andoe urged, 'an' lean to the left—to the left, sir! Then forrard—a bit more forrard. . . . Hold the lanthorn up! Ay, hold it so; an' press forrards!'

It was just at the moment that Hartas Theyn was descending through the aperture made in the bottom of the little schooner, that suddenly, though perhaps not altogether unexpectedly, the hull lurched terribly to one side.

All happened, so to speak, in a moment. Hartas had entered the tiny cabin; he had discovered at a glance that it already seemed filled with water. But there, over on one side, was a sight to tax the manhood within him to the uttermost. He looked, he shrank. he compelled himself to look again, and from his white lips a cry burst—a cry of bitterest anguish:

'Barbara, Barbara! for God's sake speak to me—speak one word! Say you are alive!'

The word might have been said, for Barbara Burdas was still living; but it was at that moment that the unmanageable hull of the wrecked schooner gave a tremendous roll to the leeward side.

The girl was there in the cabin; she had been there with the water up to her waist—nay, higher—for many hours; and there, beside her, their little plump white hands clinging in her strong, beautiful hair, were the three little children.

Hartas Theyn did not know then that two of these little ones were dead. He did not know then that the small white fingers entwined in the broad red plaits had been entwined in the death-agony that had ended hours ago. Barbara knew. She had known it all, lived through it all, and was living yet. She turned her face to Hartas as he entered—a white, rigid, agonized face. . . . She could not speak. The dim lantern threw but a faint light. Hartas saw the look turned upon him—that appalling, bewildered look—and he saw the other faces behind—one lying white and cold upon Barbara's neck, but yet living. The others he had no time to see. No time at all was his, for hardly had he entered the cabin—already three-parts filled with water—when another terrible roll turned the wrecked hull completely on the other side. The water rose even as he looked—rose till it encircled the throat of the girl, and only by her utmost effort could she uplift the one child yet living above the lifeless forms of the two not alive. Hartas rushed toward her, seized the child—it was the baby Ildy—and with his disengaged arm he tried to reach Barbara herself; but she drew back.

'Save the little one,' she said in a faint whisper, only just to be heard above the gurgling, and rushing, and washing of the water—'save Ildy; she's the only one left to be saved.'

Save her! But how? The child's fingers were not easily dis-entangled from the girl's long wet hair; the other little dead white



hands, rigid, cold, must be left for some one else to unclothe. He would do what he could for those left living.

'Can you follow me—can you make any effort to follow me?' Hartas asked of the exhausted girl. But she only shook her head, and held out to him her two poor hands.

One may not here use the words others used freely in describing those hands. They had been used in knocking upon the rough inner side of the ship's hull so long, and with such agonizing effort, that not even the water that reached to the topmost beam might wash away that which is the sign and mark of the extreme of suffering everywhere.

In a few minutes more the living child was safe in the strong arm of one of the men outside; the two children not living were lifted tenderly and gently out from the water-filled cabin. Then, just as David Andoe and Hartas Theyn were helping Barbara, taking her from out of that dread and terrible prison-house wherein she had suffered so long and so unspeakably, just at that moment the boat was seen coming swiftly over the dark, gray, restless waters. The waning moon had dropped behind the land, large and low, and having, as it were, a presage of ill yet to be in its weird aspect; but only one of these rescuers noted the strange light, the still stranger shadows. The boat came onward. It was received with a subdued shout of welcome; and as the rowers turned the corner of the stern of the swaying hull and pulled up to the side on which Barbara Burdas was lying pale, exhausted, at least one strong man felt the unaccustomed burning of hot tears on his face.

'God be thanked!' David Andoe said reverently, as he caught the delivering boat by one of the rowlocks. Hartas Theyn and another man were helping Barbara to rise from the wet, dark planks of the wrecked hull. 'God be thanked!' he repeated; and no one remembered any other word of his.

## CHAPTER LXL

'AND AFTER MY LONG VOYAGE I SHALL REST.'

'Here is one who loves you as of old,  
With more exceeding passion than of old.'

As Barbara Burdas was lifted carefully, tenderly, by strong and tender arms into the fishing-coble (the *Lucy Ann*, of Ulvstan Bight), she heard a voice speaking low at her side:

'Your grandfather—where is he? Not in the cabin?'

Barbara hesitated, a sob escaped her lips, then she said with much effort:

'No; he's not there—there's no one there!'

She could say no more. She knew that the one living child—the child of her dead friend—was yet alive; that it was safe in the arms of the fisherman who had seated himself in the stern of the coble that was as an ark of safety; and it seemed to her, in



her dread exhaustion, that there was little else she cared to know just then.

Nature demanded a time of oblivion—a time of forgetfulness of all that she had gone through—of all that she had been delivered from. To know that she might now not only cease from suffering, from enduring, from dreading, from hoping, from praying, but also from living, was knowledge to be grateful for.

She sank down between the planks of the boat, near to the man who was holding the child so carefully, and then, closing her eyes, she knew no more for awhile. It was well that she did not. It was not a long while ; but it was long enough for that to happen which was to cause her and others many a long hour of bitter pain—of keen regret.

They were all seated in the coble, the rescuers and the rescued ; her bow was turned to the Bight. The rowers had set themselves to work with a will.

The *Lucy Ann* was a well-built craft, and, free of fish or nets, would have carried sixteen or eighteen men without being overladen ; but the *Lucy Ann* had no fair chance that dim, gray morning. It was really morning now. At first a gray dawn spread slowly across the sky ; then, as the sun uprose, a few faint pink and silver clouds shot pink and silvery rays across the sea.

The *Lucy Ann* had her crew and passengers all on board. The rowers, four of them, were at the oars ; but the craft was not, as was soon perceived, laden with due balance. The boat dipped deeply on one side.

‘Wad ya mind changin’ yer seat, sir ?’ Joe Ganton asked, looking to Hartas Theyn, who was on the starboard side of the coble, which was dipping almost into the rippling water.

Hartas rose at once, weak with emotion, unsteady with exhaustion ; and before anyone knew what had happened he had overbalanced himself, and was struggling in the white waves at the side of the fishing-coble. He could not swim ; and David Andoe, unfortunately for himself, knew that he could not.

David uttered no word ; he waited one second till the Squire’s son rose to the surface at the stern of the *Lucy Ann*, then he leapt overboard. And everyone in the fishing-coble was glad, for Hartas Theyn was saved. It was only the work of a minute or two to bring the boat round, to draw the two men on board. It was not till long afterward that they knew that one living man had been drawn out of the sea, and one man who was dead.

Why David Andoe had died in that perilous moment was more than even Dr. Douglas could say ; but the doctor was Christian enough not to insist upon knowing—upon investigating what scientists would term the exact cause. What did it matter whether a vein in the man’s brain had burst ; whether valve in the heart had ceased to act—of what value to anyone could such merely technical information be ? He had laid down his life ; and



only the man for whom he had done this knew how surely David Andoe himself would have said 'for a friend.'

By the time the *Lucy Ann* touched the shore of Ulvstan Bight, it seemed as if the whole village must be there. It was nearly daylight now. A cool, soft breeze was upon land and sea; the tide was at its height. The coble had to be rowed quite close up to the quay on which the struggling crowds were standing, each one anxious to see, to learn if there could be truth in the strange story that had sped from lip to lip with the rising of the sun.

No one spoke as Barbara was lifted out; it seemed as if no one had courage to ask if she were living or not. A few saw her pallid face as she was borne away; it looked very rigid, very death-like. A murmur swayed through the crowd as of mingled awe and compassion.

The next to be brought ashore was little Ildy; and the child sat up in the arms of the fisherman who carried her, and smiled as she passed. More than one wept to see the smile, it was so wan, so weak.

There was much weeping in Ulvstan Bight that morning. As for Ailsie, the old fishwives said one to another: 'She were thrown back fra the sea, and the sea was sure to claim her again.' Still they shed tears for her, for the little one had been loved and loving.

It was not until Hartas Theyn had been assisted to land that the real truth with regard to David Andoe became known. Hartas himself did not know it. He had been sitting quite close to the dead fisherman: he had noticed not only the silence, the pallor, but that strange and inexplicable change that comes over the features when the 'fever called living' is over for ever. These things he had seen, and a great dread had come down upon him—an overwhelming dread. Was not the tale of disaster complete before?

Coming in over the gray waves in the morning light, listening all unconsciously to the dip of the oars, watching the growing beauty of the dead face, not knowing surely that it was death he looked upon, the remembrance of that meeting on the Scaur at midnight came over him with force; yet it was not a painful remembrance.

He could feel again the touch—the warm clasp of the fisherman's hand when they parted. That hand was quite close to him now, but for very reverence he refrained from laying upon it his own.

And now—now he stood upon the crowded slip-way; and others helped to raise David Andoe, thinking that he must have fainted from exhaustion.

They spoke to him as they raised him from his seat in the boat, but he did not answer. One, more clear-sighted than the rest, covered him with a piece of sail-cloth: he did not resist.

Unfortunately for herself, poor old Susan Andoe met the small procession as it began to wind up the way to the Forecliff. Her cry rings yet in the ear of some who heard it.

'Davy, my Davy!' she cried passionately. 'Let ma speak to him! Will ya? He's my oän—let ma speak to him!'



She would have flung herself upon the roughly-shrouded figure but for those who were near to prevent her. All the way up the cliff she followed, and cried with tremulous lips and sobbing breath:

'Davy, my Davy! If ya will but speak! Ah'll be a better mother to ya, my lad—eh, Ah will! Ah'll be a better mother nor ever Ah've been before! Nobbut speak to ma!'

## CHAPTER LXII.

### BARBARA'S STORY.

'His was the fate to suffer grievous woe,  
And mine to mourn without forgetfulness.'

WORSLEY'S *Odyssey*.

'DEAR UNCLE HUGH,' Thorhilda had written late one night in haste, 'I have just seen yesterday's newspaper. What is this terrible story about a ship being found floating bottom upward, filled with water, and some Ulvstan Bight fisher-folk *still alive* in the cabin? Can it be true? Please tell me all particulars very soon. Are they, any of them, people I know?'

There was more than this in the letter—much more. Some things there were that made the Canon glad, and some that made him sad. The mere sight of his niece's handwriting always now made his heart ache.

Over a week had elapsed between the disaster and the day when Canon Godfrey listened to the details as Barbara Burdas alone could tell them.

Inevitably it had been a week of pain, but Barbara wondered at herself that the pain was not deeper. She had stood in the churchyard by the open graves on that day when David Andoe was laid by the side of his sister, when her little Ailsie and Stevie had been laid to rest in the grave of their own mother, and through it all she had shed no tear.

Hartas Theyn, standing opposite to her, watching the white set face of the woman he loved, would rather have seen her weep. He had enough insight into her true character to know all that her apparent self-control meant. Some there were there who considered her calmness to be apathy; others wondered if it were possible that the terrible experience she had gone through should have left some cloud on her brain, some dulness, some incapacity; and in truth these did not altogether mistake, as Canon Godfrey perceived.

'All that Barbara *could* tell she told me very calmly,' he said, in writing to Miss Theyn. 'She told me how the storm came on suddenly in a few hours after they left Hild's Haven—how the captain had insisted upon her and the three children being fastened down in the cabin.'

"And he wanted my grandfather to stay in the cabin with us,"



Barbara said. "And I begged him to stay myself, for I knew it was but little use he'd be on deck if a gale came on; but he wouldn't listen—no, not for a moment, and Captain Baildon had no time to waste just then. I could hear that preparations for the worst were being made. After we were made safe—safe as they thought, I heard strange noises on deck, as if the sea were sweeping over the schooner, and by-and-by, sometime during that first night, a mast fell; I judged it to be the mainmast; but the children slept on through it all, all three of them—Ildy on my knee, and Steve and Ailsie in the captain's berth.

"It must have been some hours afterward when the second mast went by the board. I heard the captain shouting to Peter Grainger, and I listened for some reply, but none ever came. And all the while the schooner was driving on, rolling, rocking, tossing. I judged it was quite unmanageable. And all the while I was hearkening for my grandfather's voice, but I never heard it, no, not once after we were shut into the cabin. . . . I've thought since that perhaps he went soon on in the storm, and that was why the captain never come anear the cabin-door; no, not so much as to tell me how the night was going, or to ask me if I wanted aught for the children. 'Twas not like him to keep away in that manner, and there was plenty of opportunities, for, as I said afore, 'twere more like a succession of severe squalls nor like a reg'lar gale; and every now and then there was something that was almost like a calm, so that anybody might have brought us a word of comfort, if there was any to bring, or anyone to bring it. I've thought since that there might not be, especially after that time when the captain cried so loud to Peter. It's strong in my mind that when the second mast went overboard, Peter Grainger went with it, and that after that the captain would be there at the helm all alone—all alone on the storm-swept deck of that bare hull. I could see him, so to speak. . . . I can see him now."

'All this Barbara told me quite quietly. She seemed to be living through the dread and terror over again, and to have the same calm strength that had helped her and supported her then.

'There was a pause in her story after she had seemed to see the captain standing before her. When she began again she seemed a little confused, as if not able easily to find words for all that came after. Hitherto she had spoken just as I have written, with an easy flow of words—simple English words—but evidently now and then echoing some phrase of some rather archaic book. Her voice is lower and sweeter than ever; her sad, simple manner is most touching; and naturally these new sorrows have lent a new elevation. *Lent*—nay, that is not the word at all. It will not depart.

'When she took up her story again, she was like one awakening from a dreadful sleep.

"It must have been a long time," she said, "a very long time that we were tossing there, but I'd no means of knowing how long. I only remember that Ildy wakened now and then; and I gave her



a little milk so long as there was any in the bottle ; and when there was no more she fretted a bit ; but she always fell asleep again. The others slept strangely ; and I *was* glad.

“Now and then there was a time of comparative calm. I heard the roar of the water and of the wind, but not near so bad as during the squalls ; and there was very little noise overhead. A chain rattled as the hull rocked up and down ; now and then some part of the dismantled ship gave a creak or a groan, and there was something that I thought might be a water-cask rolling to and fro on deck with the lurching of the vessel ; but there was no footstep, no, none at all ; and there was no voice. Once I thought I'd rise to my feet, and knock and ask Captain Baildon if he knew where we were ; but somehow I'd no strength to do it. And yet, no, 'twas not strength I wanted, but—but courage.

“The things I was beginning to fear were such terrible things that I dreaded the moment when I must find that they were more than fears.

“I'll never know—I think it never can be known—whether or no through all these hours the captain was at the helm or no. As I've said, I heard no voice, no footstep ; no, not though I held my very breath to listen.

“I can't say how long that time that was almost a time of calm had lasted. I fancied at times that there was a ray of faint light in a chink overhead, but I couldn't be sure. And then, as I listened, I began to be aware that another squall was coming on ; not quite so sudden as some of them had come, but I liked the sound of it none the better for that.

“The wind deepened and hoarsened, and now it was like a long, low wail, and now it was like a wild shriek, and the hull strained and groaned, and it rolled and tossed, and I knew that the sea must be making worse than ever before.

“Did I pray ? you ask me, sir. I'd been praying at intervals all the while—not kneeling down much, for which I was sorry ; but the child was on my knee, and I dreaded to wake her for fear of awakening the others. I prayed that they might go on sleeping ; and their sleep was beautiful to me. I could not see them, but I could hear their soft, reg'lar breathing. And once Ailsie spoke in her sleep—that was a way she had always from being a baby.

“‘It's that lady, Miss Theyn,' she said, in the voice that I knew to be her dream-voice. ‘It's Miss Theyn ; her that gave me the Christmas-cards, and touched them all so gentle with her gentle hands. And she's going up a hill—such a high green hill ! and she can't get up ; no, she can't. Oh, Barbara, go an' help her ; she's slippin' back at every step an' hardly getting any further at all. An' she does so want to get to the top ! I can see why ! I can see it all now. There's a beautiful city over the hill, an' she wants to go there, but she can't get up that green hillside. Oh, *why* can't she ? Why ? Will nobody help her ?’”

‘This is just what Barbara told me, Thorda dear. Can you put



a meaning to it? I wish the dream had gone a little farther; that Ailsie had seen the help coming! Isn't that childish of me? I am coming with the help myself one of these summer days.

"It was soon after Ailsie had done talking in her dream," Barbara went on, "that the schooner began to heave and toss more fearfully than ever before. It seemed to be *plunging* through the waves as a wild beast might plunge through a forest. We were driven on and on, and now one side of the cabin was uppermost and now the other, and the roar of wind and wave was deafening by this time.

"It was just then that a strange kind of terror came over me. It was not—I do think it was not the terror of death, for I had given up my soul, with all its sins and all its shortcomings, just as it was, into the hands of God. And as for the little ones—well, I prayed for them too, and I'd no fear.

"From time to time I'd been saying a verse of that hymn, *Just as I am, without one plea*, and it had been as comforting as Bible words themselves, for of course, they *are* Bible words just put into verse; that's why they comfort one so.

"There was one verse especially that seemed to come of itself; over and over it rang in my ears when I wasn't thinging of saying it. Is was this:

"Just as I am, and waiting not  
To cleanse my soul of one dark blot,  
To Thee, Whose blood can cleanse each spot,  
O Lamb of God, I come."

"I'd just been saying that, or no, I'd better say listening to it, when—when. . . . Oh, Mr. Godfrey, how will I ever speak of that moment? I've never spoke of it yet, never to no one. . . . But I *want* to speak of it. It will be better if I can. . . . Then, maybe, I'll not suffer so. For I *do* suffer. All night long that moment is before me. I live through it again with such terrible vividness that it has even seemed to me that I might die of the vision of things I lived through in reality.

"How will I tell you of what happened? . . . As I said, the dismasted hull of the schooner had been plunging onward, driven hither and thither for some time. . . . And a kind of terror had thrilled through me once, just once. Then that verse came, and I was growing quieter, *when all at once I knew that the schooner was sinking*.

"I felt it going down sideways. There was change in the sounds all about, not a lull in the sounds' intensity, but a dread and awful change.

"I wakened the children, hardly knowing what I was doing, but somehow I didn't wish them to be drowned—to die—in their sleep. Heaven only knows how I repented of that deed afterwards. It would have been so easy for them, so painless. As it was, their suffering was very great, and every pang I had to witness smote *me like a sin*.



“I was telling you of the moment when the ship sank. She went over on her side, slowly. The water rushed into the cabin. . . . I tried to calm the children. My little Stephen was terribly alarmed ; and I had to give more attention to him.

“There was a table in the cabin ; and, unlike most cabin tables, it was not a fixture. Seeing that it floated, I placed the children on it, and tried to keep it in one corner, but I could not. The hull was swaying up and down *on its side* ; and the cabin was half filled with water.

“Ailsie was very white, but she was very still. Seeing that the water was up to my waist, she kissed me, and said, ‘You’ll take cold, Barbie, do come up here on the table.’ And to comfort her I did lean over, holding on by the beam just above. Fortunately there was a sort of iron holdfast driven into the beam, and I took off my apron and twined it round, so that the children might have something to cling to. But this was not for long. I cannot say how long. I had got Stevie quiet again. I told him of Christ walking on the water, and said that I believed *He* wasn’t very far away from us. Then he put his arm round my neck, and twined his hands in my hair, which had all fallen loose in the tossing to and fro. After a little while Ailsie kissed me again, and laid her head on my other shoulder ; and her hands got tangled in my hair as well. Ildy was still asleep. She slept strangely all through the worst of everything. For some time, it might be an hour, it might be more, I stood there by the table. The water rose and fell with the rising and falling of the hull ; it was very cold, and chilled us to the marrow ; but we seemed to get used to that.

“Once or twice Stevie slept awhile ; and once or twice I sang, just little snatches of hymns the children liked. It seemed to quiet them when they grew frightened. But they were strangely little frightened : they didn’t know that all was overed ; and I could not tell them.

“No, I don’t know how long it was before, at last, the hull turned completely bottom upward. It gave a lurch, the water rose all at once, it rose to my very throat, for a minute or two. I held Ildy up above it with one hand, and Ailsie with the other. Stevie was still holding by my hair, and that kept him up.

“I knew now that the vessel was quite upside down, and that it was floating on over the sea, tossed to and fro in the storm. And I also knew that we four were the only living beings on the hull. No man on the deck could have outlived the capsizing of the schooner. It was very strange ; I’d no wish to live ; and yet it didn’t seem right to die till I was forced. Besides, I knew that I must outlive the last of the children. That was nearly all I prayed for.

“’Twas a desperate time and long. . . . O Lord, how long ! They saw now it was only a day and a night from the upturning of the schooner ; but then I can’t think they know. *I* knew ! Standing there with the cold sea-water up to my throat, and three



children clinging to my hair, *I* knew. . . . O God, I'll know always! I'll feel those hands in my hair till I die! I can tell you no more, sir; my strength fails when I think of it.

"I don't rightly remember when I knew that Stevie was dead. He died first, which you wouldn't have thought, him being so much stronger than Ailsie. But he died first. Yet his hands never left my hair. He was clinging to that when—when they found us. And little Ailsie's hands were twining close to his, so they said. I had known that she was dead. . . . Oh yes, I had known that for days.

"And I remember so well the last word she said. The water was swaying and tossing about the dark cabin rather wildly just then; and she was swayed and tossed with it, and the little one that was dead was tossing too. I think that pained me even more than the other. And I knew by Ailsie's voice that she was getting near the end.

"Can ya kiss me, Barbie?" she begged. "Can ya kiss me just once?"

"So I tried to turn my head, and I felt a little cold wet hand pressing my cold face. . . . And somehow the kiss was given. Then the little one drifted further from me, keeping one hand in my hair always. And the last I heard was a word of prayer.

"Lift me out of the water, good Jesus; lift me away, for I'm tired—despert tired. Lift me away out o' this dark water."

"I did not know when she went. . . . For many hours I knew nothing.

"You know the rest, Canon Godfrey, how we were saved—the child and me. It is a miracle—more and more as I am able to think, I see that the saving of us two was a miraculous thing. Who took care of the little one, and kept the life in her, when life was all but gone from myself?"

"Do you know I have a strong and strange feeling that her being saved was for some strong and strange design. . . . Will you think of that, sir—will you remember it? Will you write it down that I have said that I believe that Ilda, the child of Anna Tyas, was strangely saved from a strange death that her life might be of some especial use; perhaps lived to some especial purpose? I cannot see, not yet; but I think that I shall see."

'And God grant that you may,' replied the Rector of Yarburgh, rising from his seat in Barbara's cottage. It was hers only now. Presently by way of parting words, he said: 'You have asked me to note the child's life. . . . I shall not be here to note it. . . . But I will leave the words that you have said in writing for those who come after me.'

'You will not be here?' Barbara asked, with lips whiter than they had been before.

'No,' the Canon replied calmly; but seeing the girl's distress, he added a word of comfort. 'I shall not be here,' he said, 'but I trust that I shall be with those who thank God because they are at



rest. . . . Yes, *at rest!* . . . You, yourself, must know what it is to be weary ; to crave for rest when weariness is a burden too heavy to be borne. . . . Think so of me, when you think at all, as of one only too glad to reach the haven where he has longed to be. . . . But I am anticipating,’ he said, with a sweet sudden smile as he turned away. ‘The end is not yet.’

### CHAPTER LXIII.

#### ‘AND NOW THE DAY IS NEARLY DONE.’

‘When the unfit  
Contrarious moods of men recoil away,  
And isolate pure spirits, and permit  
A place to stand and love in for a day,  
With darkness and the death-hour rounding it.’

E. B. BROWNING : *Sonnets from the Portuguese.*

‘A DULL little place,’ say some visitors from London, promenading slowly up and down the quay at Ulvstan Bight. Once more it is summer ; once more the skies make a deep blue background, against which the white wings of the sea-gulls may flit and circle ; once more the fishing-fleet lies off the land on still evenings, swaying slowly too and fro in the sunny yellow mist. On the moor, far up above the Bight, the heather is bursting into bloom ; the foxgloves rise above the green bracken ; by the stony waysides the little blue harebell stirs and quivers to the light evening breeze. Late as it is a lark is singing overhead, and by-and-by a robin perched on a stunted hawthorn-bush chirps out a vesper song of his own.

“‘A dull little place!’ they say,” Canon Godfrey repeated half audibly, and with a smile not free from pity on his face.

He was so glad to be ‘dull’—in other words, to have a time of perfect quiet, made more perfect by the exceeding beauty of the place and of the hour.

How long he had been up there on the moorland height, drinking in the fresh, free air, the welcome stillness, feeling his very soul within him soothed and healed as he stood or walked, and listened and gazed, he hardly knew.

‘One such hour is worth days of troubled living,’ he said to himself. ‘It is good to be here.’

But his enjoyment of solitude was almost at an end. Carriage-wheels were heard grinding slowly up the stony hill, and inevitably a momentary sense of annoyance came upon him. But this departed as suddenly as it came.

When Mrs. Meredith stopped her carriage to speak to him, he was able to lift a quite unclouded face. Yet, as she saw, it was a very weary face ; almost she felt a shock as she looked into it. Only the kind blue eyes were unchanged.

She had something to tell to Canon Godfrey. She had meant to



announce it, but being softened by the sight of him, her mood was much modified.

‘Will you drive with me a little way?’ she asked. ‘All the way, if you can. Won’t the first grouse of the year tempt you?’

‘The first grouse!’ Hugh Godfrey repeated, in a quiet and meditative way. ‘How cruel of you to mention it! You know that Milicent is waiting for me; and though not exactly a henpecked husband——’

‘Oh, hush! Won’t I tell your wife!’

‘Very well; only come and tell her soon. Will you come to luncheon to-morrow? I am afraid I can’t promise grouse—not yet awhile.’

Mrs. Meredith hesitated a moment; and Canon Godfrey could hardly help watching her, wondering in much perplexity what might be the meaning of this great and sudden change of attitude. From that winter’s day with its dread disaster till now, she had never relaxed from her first severity of mood and manner. Certainly there must be some reason for the change.

‘No, I won’t come to-morrow,’ Mrs. Meredith replied. She was one of those people who can be most graciously ungracious without giving offence. ‘Not to-morrow,’ she repeated. ‘I have something to tell you. I will tell you now; and then I will accept the first invitation that comes from the Rectory afterward. . . . Not that I have anything to fear—of course not!’ she added, with a short little laugh of superiority. ‘It is quite the other way. You should be glad of my news; for *every* reason you should be glad. . . . Percival is going to be married.’

The Canon looked into Mrs. Meredith’s face with a quick, glad, half-surprised look on his own. Then he held out his hand, which was taken warmly.

‘You are congratulating me without knowing the lady!’ she exclaimed.

‘Don’t I know her? Am I mistaken? surely not! It is Gertrude?’

‘Now that is good of you,’ Mrs. Meredith replied. ‘And it is so like you, to divine it all—to spare me the moment; yes, it is quite characteristic. And now tell me honestly what you think—as if you were my brother.’

‘Well, then, honestly, I am wondering which of them is the most to be congratulated. Of course, one knows what the world will say—this tiresome, worrying little world all about us. It will be said everywhere that Gertrude is the fortunate person—and truly she is fortunate, from a certain point of view—which she will be able to appreciate; *most* fortunate. But there is a good deal to be said on the other side. I can offer very sincere congratulations to Percival. Miss Douglas is not only a beautiful woman: I consider her to have an absolutely perfect temper—no light matter in married life. . . . Yes, certainly I can congratulate him; I congratulate you *now*—on the spot. I can hardly imagine any station in life



that would not be graced by the presence of the woman your son has chosen to be his lifelong companion. . . . I can say no more.'

Mrs. Meredith was not often emotional ; but she could not reply easily just now. She shook hands once more, and more warmly, with the Canon, and drove off, saying :

'I shall expect that invitation to luncheon ; add a grace to it by sending it soon. . . . Life has not been the same since I was banished from the Rectory.'

'Banished ? You !' the Canon exclaimed, his hat in his hand as the carriage drove away.

And long afterwards Mrs. Meredith smiled as she leaned back in her carriage, recalling the kind blue eyes, the winning smile, the charm, the fascination that was about all that Canon Godfrey said or did.

'Forgive !' she exclaimed to herself ; 'one would forgive him anything—everything !'

Then, a little later, when the distance was wider, the upland hills more deeply purple, the summer evening breeze more chill and sad, she added yet another word.

'Forgive—forgive *him* ! Good God ! I say it in all reverence, I say, good God, forgive *us*, who do not know him—who cannot see him ! It is only the reflection of his soul that one sees—only a most marred and hindered, and darkened, yet most beautiful vision.

'I never see that man, I never hear the sound of his voice, but I wish to be a better woman—a more unselfish woman, and more self-denying. . . . And there is more than that. . . . What is it ? What is the atmosphere that is all about him, that impresses one so ? . . . Sure one can feel what it is—one must feel—it is the atmosphere of *prayer* !

'One takes knowledge of him, *that he has been with Jesus.*'

\* \* \* \* \*

Quite late that summer night a shepherd was returning from the town of Yarburgh to a moorland farm. It was a very bright night. The moon was nearly at the full, and shone out clear and cloudless from a heaven of deep dark blue. The stars were numerous and brilliant as the stars on a deep and frosty night in midwinter.

All the way over the narrow, stony moorland road the man went whistling, not from cowardice, but for very pleasure. The night was so still, so bright, so warm, and so indisputably beautiful.

No, he had no fear, no superstition ; and when he heard suddenly from under the stunted hawthorn-tree by the moorland wall a cry, or rather a quiet and gentle appeal for help, he turned aside without dread. He stooped over the figure lying there ; then, with a sudden shock as of pain, Reuben Lodge drew himself up hurriedly.

'It's never *you*, sir ?—it's never *Canon Godfrey* !'

'I'm afraid it is, Reuben. . . . Can you help me ? Can you get other help ? . . . There is a dog-cart at the Leas—isn't there ? But



there is no need for great haste, much less for alarm. . . . It isn't a cold night—and it's not in the least damp.'

No ; there was no need for haste. A couple of hours later the Canon was in his own study, lying on the sofa, and Dr. Douglas was there, speaking rough-and-ready truth as usual.

'I've seen it coming ; months ago I told you what that under-action of the heart would mean if you didn't take care. And what care have you taken ?'

The doctor's tone was a little harsh, a little brusque ; but it may be that Canon Godfrey defined the source of the brusqueness. His reply was in marked contrast.

'Don't scold me, Douglas,' he begged gently, putting out a beseeching hand, which the doctor would not see.

Instead, he walked off to the window and looked out, saying, by-and-by, in a strange and unusual voice :

'Scold you ! It's too late ! . . . Would to God it wasn't !'

'You mean that I shall not recover ? . . . Well, I had not expected it, and may I be forgiven for saying I had not desired it.'

'No, that I believe—that I have seen long ago ; but without being able for one moment to understand. . . . Why, what would you have ? What is there in life worth having that you haven't got ?'

The Canon smiled ; then presently he said .

'Don't think me ungrateful, or even unperceptive. I have had much that many have envied me. I had comparative success early in life, and ever since I have tasted the fruit of that success. But one doesn't wear one's heart on one's sleeve—not if one is wise—still less does one publish one's whole affairs to the world. I have not done so. And now at this late hour I may say that I have hidden cares and anxieties, caused by no fault of my own, but grave enough to have killed many men.'

'Doubtless—since they have killed you,' the doctor interposed with even more than his usual abruptness.

'Ah, well !' the Canon returned ; 'it is evident that you are in no mood to hear my confidences to-night. You must give me another opportunity when you are in a better frame of mind. . . . But one word more ; shall I send for Thorhilda ?'

'By all means. Shall I write for you ?'

'Thank you, yes ; but don't say a word to alarm her. She will come without that.'

## CHAPTER LXIV.

### 'IN TO-DAY ALREADY WALKS TO-MORROW.'

'The spirit of man is an instrument which cannot give out its deepest, finest tones, except under the immediate hand of the Divine Harmonist.'

—PROFESSOR SHAIRP.

THE Canon had been disappointed. It was not his niece's step that he had heard in the hall, but that of Lady Diana Haddingley, a



person who was almost a stranger to him, and therefore in his present state of mind and body a person to be almost dreaded. Fortunately, however, ten minutes of Lady Di's society had banished all the dread.

She was not now a young woman, far from it; and her latest peculiar fancy was to dress so that she might be mistaken for a widow. Almost inevitably, since she had dressed to the character, she had come to believe in a sort of widowhood, and not only to believe in it, but to act and speak out of her belief. Yet there was no deliberate hypocrisy in her histrionic display. She knew that others knew how it all was, and remained content to know. Still she clung to the simulated 'weeds'—the white cap, the black bonnet, the long veil that was neither crape nor gauze. Where, her friends asked, did she get such ambiguously lovely materials?

All her study, her research, was thrown away upon Canon Godfrey. He did not even remember whether she had ever been married or no.

Expecting, with a beating heart, that his niece might have arrived an hour or two before her time, and so have missed her aunt, who had gone to the station to meet her, he sank back into his chair with a new paleness on his face when the stranger was ushered into the room.

But let it be said again, ten minutes of the stranger's presence insured her welcome for as many months, if the Canon should live so long. For once there was a little sigh, remembering that he might not count so many days.

Lady Diana Haddingley was one of those rare sympathetic women who can lend themselves—and this successfully—to any hour, any mood, any circumstance, and almost any person. She had not been a quarter of an hour in the drawing-room at Yarburgh Rectory before she was in touch with all that had happened there during the past two years. And it may be that in one particular her insight went even further than that of Canon Godfrey himself.

A light seemed to flash across her mind suddenly when the name of Damian Aldenmede was mentioned. She remembered a letter that she herself had written only a few months before, just about the time fixed for Miss Theyn's marriage; and she also remembered Mrs. Godfrey's reply—a letter disclosing much more than the Canon's wife had meant to disclose. In fact, it had been so worded as to convey meanings of which Mrs. Godfrey herself was ignorant. Yet, curiously enough, these hidden meanings held the very core of the truth of all that had happened at the Rectory.

'Ah! yes. I remember Mr. Aldenmede was here; he was here ever so long. I told your wife all the gossip I had heard from Sarah Channing. I don't believe in it much, though. Sarah always gets hold of the wrong end of a story. . . . I dare say you know about it all. There was a fish-wife as heroine—the mother of half a dozen little fisher-folk. . . .'

'Oh, hush! pray say no more!' the Canon begged, not too cour-



teously. 'I will tell you after about the things that must have given rise to such terrible gossip as that. It is worse than merely untrue. But, pardon me for asking it, can you tell me something of Mr. Aldenmede—anything that may be told openly and honourably? We saw so much of him, we know so little of him. But let me say that all we did know added to our admiration.'

'That was inevitable. But do you mean to say that you never heard of his great trouble—the thing that drove him from his country and his home, drove him to wander over the earth for years?'

'No, we knew nothing; we know nothing yet. But don't betray any secret to gratify curiosity of mine.'

'Secret! It was known all over Gloucestershire.'

'Is that his county?'

Lady Di smiled.

'You spoke of your curiosity just now,' she said. 'It seems you have not had enough to induce you to look into a certain book to be found in most houses. Don't you know that your artist-friend is the nephew of old Sir Ralph Aldenmede of King's Alden?'

'No. . . . I did not know. . . . But tell me something more interesting than that.'

'Interesting! You might call for sensation and not be disappointed in the present instance.'

'You are dreadfully trying, Lady Diana.'

'Because I won't come to the point? . . . Well, I won't be trying any more. I will give you the history in the fewest words possible.'

'First of all, then, to go back about fifteen years—to the time when Damian Aldenmede was a youth of one-and-twenty; a very boyish youth for his years, but clever enough, and high-minded enough; indeed, "Don Quixote" was the name we gave to him in those days. I need hardly say that he was popular—singularly popular for a man who was not likely ever to be very rich; for Sir Ralph had two sons living then, Charles and Alfred; and Damian's mother, a widow of five-and-fifty, though well-to-do, was not counted a wealthy woman. I should say a couple of thousands a year was the extent of her income, and Damian's sole prospect was the reversion of that. But, as we always said, a couple of hundreds would have been enough for him; indeed, I do not suppose that he is spending much more than that upon himself even now. Still, his inappetence for spending money on himself did not injure his popularity—quite the reverse. He made friends everywhere, his especial friend being a certain Julian Haverfield, the son of a Lincolnshire clergyman. Mr. Haverfield spent most of his vacations at Massingham, Mrs. Aldenmede's little place in Gloucestershire, and we all knew him, and liked him. He was very fascinating.'

'Now comes the beginning of the tragedy. Damian Aldenmede fell in love—deeply, passionately in love—with a governess, the



orphan daughter of a provincial lawyer, and one of the most beautiful girls I have ever seen in my life. Her features were small, refined, and most exquisitely cut; to look at her profile was like looking at a cameo; and her colouring was simply the cream and carnation of Millais' baby-girls. We were all in love with her; and she knew it, expected it, for the girl had no more brain than a butterfly. How such a man as Damian Aldenmede could ever have cared for her for three consecutive days puzzled everybody who could not see that a man who is also an artist is open to temptation on a side not vulnerable in ordinary men. It was the artist that was attracted first; the man was subjugated later. There must, of course, have been *something* more than mere beauty in Miss Florence Underhay—some gentleness, some womanliness, some indefinable fascination, or Damian Aldenmede had never contrived to make wreck of his life in the complete way he contrived to do.

'The tragedy might never have been so complete if his mother had not been as proud as she was shallow. When she came to know that Damain was engaged—actually engaged to the governess of her late grocer (now retired, and living in a beautiful villa at Clifton)—her anger knew no bounds.

'There must have been some terrible scenes, for Damian's love and regard for his mother had always been noticeable. However, in the end, she disinherited him as far as she had power to do. She had a new will made, and left the greater part of her possessions to a niece, the daughter of a favourite sister.

'At last comes the most dramatic part of the story. Miss Florence Underhay came to know of the new will, and from that day she changed to the man who was to have been her husband, who had lavished the love of a strong heart and brain upon her to an extent she had only found wearisome.

'The end came quickly. One fine morning Damian received a double letter, two sheets in two different hand-writings in one envelope. The first he read was from his friend Julian Haverfield, a man he had loved as his own soul. The letter announced the approaching marriage of Mr. Haverfield and Miss Florence Underhay.

'The second letter was from Miss Underhay herself. It was almost brutally candid.

'She had not deceived Mr. Aldenmede, she said. She had loved him, she had meant to marry him; but learning what would be the pecuniary result of such a marriage, she had not hesitated in her decision to break off the engagement at once. Almost at the same moment, Mr. Haverfield, to whom she had spoken of her resolution, had made her an offer. Being a richer man than Damian Aldenmede had ever hoped to be, she had, of course, accepted him. She added that she had had enough of poverty, of all that was meant by narrow means.

'In conclusion, she said, "I ask you to forgive me, and to forget me. I am persuaded that there will come a day when you will be



glad that I have acted thus. I was no fit wife for you. For a long time past it has been a strain to me to live up to your expectations. You required too much."

'Imagine the blow to a man like Aldenmede! His mother told me that she believed the broken friendship was at least as much as the broken love. He has never been himself since—not the self he was before.

'As a matter of course, Mrs. Aldenmede again changed her intentions as to the disposal of her property, much to the dismay of her niece, Clara Young, who was already beginning to be looked upon as an heiress, and had refused more than one eligible offer because she considered that such a fortune as the one she was expecting ought at least to secure for her a title. Damian has been very good to her since his mother's death, and very helpful to her husband; indeed, he is good to everybody.'

So Lady Di ended her story. She had told it in a very bald and crude fashion, as she knew, and the Canon knew that too, but all the same his heart ached as he listened.

Now he knew why the artist had worn always that sad face; why he had, in a certain sense, striven to hide his real position from such as did not know it. Doubtless, the man was hoping to win some love for himself alone, untainted by appreciation of aught that he might possess.

Had this also been a mistake? Had it even led to a new undoing?

There was silence in the room for awhile. In the heart of each of the two people there the same idea was pressing, and this with all the force of prophecy.

'They must meet again?' the Canon said to himself; and then in the quiet that followed he felt the spirit within him grow calm and sure.

'It will be well, it will all be well,' so it seemed that some voice was saying. And just then came the sound of carriage-wheels, the opening and shutting of doors, the words of welcome uttered by his wife. For a moment he felt overcome, but he strove and was victorious. A minute later Thorda was kneeling by his sofa, and her eyes were wet, her voice broken by emotion.

'Say you forgive me, Uncle Hugh—say that once again!' she cried. And, indeed, the agony of her mind was very great.

Till her sorrow had come she had never known how she had loved this man who lay there dying, nor had she till then dreamt of what his love for her had been. The past few months had shown her all with a most vigorously bitter showing.

No day or hour had passed but she had missed his care, his tranquil, mindful affection. That other love, stifled half-successfully in her heart, had caused her less constant misery than this.

To be there in the old room, to kneel beside him, to hold his hand, to look into his face, was an emotion that for the time absorbed all others. She did not know when Lady Diana and her



aunt went out ; she only knew that at last she and her uncle were alone.

It was an hour she had longed for, waited for, dreamt of unceasingly. There had been no misunderstanding between them ; but since that sad crisis in her life there had not been opportunity for the perfect understanding, the oneness of mind and heart she so yearned for. Now it might be—that perfect unity ; if only for a little while. She did not yet dream how short the interval was to be.

It is better not to know, but it is well to remember all that knowledge might mean. The next word we utter might be gentler and tenderer if we knew it would be spoken to one over whom the wings of Azrael were already silently spreading ; silent with the silence of the land beyond.

## CHAPTER LXV.

### THE UNEXPECTED.

• Still onward winds the dreary way ;  
I with it, for I long to prove  
No lapse of moons can conquer love,  
Whatever fickle tongues may say.'

*In Memoriam.*

THOSE were glorious autumn days. Now and then, when Canon Godfrey was well enough, he and his niece walked out over the moor beyond the Rectory, sauntering up the stony hillside pathways with leagues upon leagues of crimson heather on either side. The warm yellow sunlight heightened the tone of things near and far, the blue sea stretched quietly from point to point. White-winged gulls sailed lazily overhead on the one hand ; startled grouse whirled tremulously on the other. No other sounds disturbed the enchanting stillness.

On one of these days—it was early in September—the Canon was in a brighter mood than usual. He seemed stronger, able to walk better and faster.

‘Ah, what it is to feel strong again, young again !’ he said, turning aside so that he might sit down to rest awhile on the top of Barugh Houe, an ancient British cairn at the top of Yarburgh Moor. It was a favourite spot. There was the sea he had always loved so passionately in the distance ; the moors he had loved with a love almost equally strong were all about him, glowing in their richest beauty, the crown of the year lying upon each moorland brow. And the free fresh air was as wine to the man whose wine of youth and strength had been drained prematurely to the lees. To-day he rejoiced again with a new rejoicing.

‘It is almost worth while to have felt faint and weak and worthless, to know the joy of renewed strength,’ he went on. ‘Life would be worth living if only to have a day now and then like this. I can



hardly believe now that once, and not so long ago, life was lived always on such terms as these ! That I slept at night a painless and refreshing sleep, that I awoke always as a child awakes, glad of the new day ; my brain busy with new thought ; my heart warm with new and expectant emotion. Yes. . . . I think I was a happy man, very happy. . . . There were hidden troubles ; but I bore them—I think I may say that, by the grace of God, I bore them well ; *but I was not strong enough to go on bearing them* ; and I fear now that it was because I had not sufficient spiritual strength. We know nothing of ourselves, not yet. We know nothing of the way the soul's strength acts upon the strength of the body. The strong soul is at peace. Peace means opportunity for growth, development for all that is hindered by tumult, by anger, by distress. Give the soul an atmosphere of calm, and all will be well. . . . And I am calm to-day, very calm. . . . But how egotistic I am growing ! Thorda dear, how is it with you ?

Miss Theyn was sitting among the crimson heather at her uncle's feet ; a woman older by ten years than she had seemed ten months ago. It was a topic of conversation everywhere that her good looks were gone ; and for once gossip was not mistaken.

She was quite aware of her loss—what true woman would not have been ? She knew that she was thin and pale ; that her eyes had lost both colour and brightness ; in a word, that she was faded and *passée* to an extent her years by no means excused. Yet the change did not distress her. She had passed beyond the possibility of distresses of that kind.

'How is it with me ?' she repeated. 'Well, I could almost echo your own words. I, too, have peace. Not perfect peace—it is not always with me. There are breaks in it at times

“When I think of what I am, and what I might have been.”

'But as I told you the other day, Thorda dear, I am very sure it is not a wise thing to live too much in an unhappy or mistaken past.'

'I agree with you completely. "Not too much ;" but, on the other hand, if one could forget it altogether, would it be wise to do so ? Is there not a sort of safety in remembering past falls ?'

'Yes ; if one doesn't remember them to the point of depression in the present. I have seen a human being so borne down by the sense of past sin as to have neither hope nor energy left for even making an effort to rise again. It is not so with you, I know. I would only warn you, because I know your tendency to brood over the past. . . . Let it go, dear. It is possible

“To be as if you had not been till now ;  
And now were simply *what you choose to be.*”

There was silence while Miss Theyn drank in the beauty, the strength, of this most strengthening thought.



‘Not *quite* what one chooses to be, Uncle Hugh,’ she said presently. ‘The past must always have its influence on the present.’

‘And the present on the future. That is the immense value of the present hour ; it must in a measure dominate the hours to be. Yet there is truth in the poet’s word. One strong effort may save a soul on the brink of destruction. Think of Zacchæus, of the splendid picture painted of him by St. Luke. He had been drawn by mere rumour to wish to see Jesus. He knew himself to be a sinner, an ungodly man, rapacious, cruel ; yet the germ of good, the ideal, was in him as it is in most men. He wished to see Jesus, he saw Him, and more than that, was seen of Him ; requested to come down from the tree into which he had climbed ; and then (what *must* his astonishment have been ?) the Master said, “I wish to come to your house to abide there.”

“And he made haste, and came down, and received him joyfully.”

Joyfully, ah, yes indeed, think of his joy !

‘There is often something touching, often something noble, even in the hated thing we call condescension. A man of high rank may condescend to one of lower rank, even the lowest, and gain an added grace in the act. Suspicion may be there on the one side and on the other ; but if there be nothing to be suspected, the presence of suspicion can do no real or permanent harm.

‘But the greatest condescension of all—the truest, the most noble, the most touching—is when one who has worn the white flower of a blameless life condescends to one whose lilies of purity were dragged in the dust long ago. That is the one condescension worthy of note.

‘A rich man speaking to a poor man can have no human or spiritual aversion to make his speaking an act of self-sacrifice. A lady with an ancient and honourable title cannot really feel that the pure and high-minded woman in whose society she finds herself is really her inferior because of the absence of the outward distinctive sign of social rank. But it is different when you come to deal with spiritual rank.

“Know that there is in man a quite indestructible reverence for whatsoever holds of heaven, or even plausibly counterfeits such holding. Show the dullest clodpole, show the haughtiest featherhead, that a soul higher than himself is actually here ; were his knees stiffened into brass, he must down and worship.”

‘Yes ; he must down and worship. On his knees he must contrast the purity, the nobility, the peace, the happiness of this man’s life with his own. Then follows the thought, the aspiration, “Can I become what this man is ? Can I rise to his pure height ? Can I find enjoyment in the things he enjoys ? Can my life be as his life ?” So the questions come. Next, suddenly and strongly, comes the resolve. In the case of Zacchæus there was no hesitation. Too often hesitation is fatal. “Behold, Lord !” he said instantly,



"the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken anything from any man by false accusation, I restore fourfold."

'And all this because of the sight of a pure spiritual face, the sound of a gentle beseeching voice.

'Conversion this is called, and rightly; but the word has been so misused as to be no longer rightly useful. The repentance in the heart and soul of Zacchæus must have been more or less rapid. Yet was it perfectly complete, entirely effectual. The Master Himself declared at once that, because of this sudden penitence, salvation had that day come to the house of the rich publican. Doubtless, of course, that hour was but the beginning of the new life—new and beautiful, full of peace, of happiness, yet neither untried nor unshaded. So it is with you, Thorda dear. Your peace—the peace you have won out of tribulation—is not unbroken, you say. How should it be in this world? Have you even the wish for unbroken peace? Surely that would mean stagnation.'

Again there was silence for a time—not an unhappy silence on either side. The Canon had recognised the change that had passed upon his niece's character; how the channels of her soul seemed deeper and wider for the tide of sorrow and remorse that had poured through them, washing away even the very stains of the selfishness that had so marred her life before. The change showed in every act of her life—nay, in her every speech, and dress, and attitude. If less brightly beautiful than of old, she was even more graceful and tender, and her gentle consideration for others never failed her.

The Canon could not help the thought that came. 'Ah, if *he* could see her now!' And with the thought came the longing, 'Let me see them before I die; let me hear them speak to each other! I shall know; I shall understand!'

It was not strange that Miss Theyn's thought should be of the same person. All about them were things to recall the few brief bright months during which she had known Damian Aldenmede. The blue far-off sea seemed to whisper of him; the purple heather rustling in the breeze had a wistfulness in its tone; and as the sun sank to the moor the voices all about seemed to grow sadder, to deepen the sense of her heart's real loneliness.

Long ago there had been an hour of awakening—an hour during which Miss Theyn had been wholly true to herself.

'It was love for *him*, though I knew it not; it was love for Damian Aldenmede that led me to do a deed that must for ever have destroyed the regard he had for me. . . . Regard? Was it not more than that I saw in his face on that day when he said "Good-bye" in the garden at Yarburgh? I deceived myself then, or tried to do so; but why try self-deception now?

'He loved me, he saw that I loved him; and he knew that I trampled on my love because of his poverty, or seeming poverty. He saw that I did that; that I encouraged another who loved *me*, and who had wealth, but for whom I had no loo



He must have seen all that ; *I know that he did.* Surely, then, it hardly needed that last suicidal act to destroy whatever of love he had for me !

‘I loved him from the first, from the first day I saw him. I had seen no one else like him ; no one so true, so calm, so great ! I have seen no one like him since, nor shall I.

‘No, it is over—my life, or rather my hope of happiness in life. But I may help to make others happy.’

So Miss Theyn was musing ; yet shall it be confessed that the conclusion, the last result of her thought, was less supremely satisfying than it should have been. But in extenuation let it be remembered that she had only just entered upon her twenty-fifth year. At twenty-five one’s opinions should be all settled ; one should be decided in politics, social science, and above all in matters theological. That one should then, at that age, have anything left to learn, much less to discover, argues ill for the completeness of one’s education.

Thorhilda Theyn’s education was yet incomplete ; but sorrow and pain had helped forward the process most satisfactorily of late. Yet that she should not be able to find perfect rest in the idea of perfect renunciation was a fact that told its own tale. Life was still strong within her, with love of all that life means. Desire for sympathy, for deep affection, still held their natural sway in her heart. She might be strong to control the yearning, strong to conceal it ; but the power to destroy it was not yet hers ; it might never be. Perhaps she hardly wished for the power.

Do we any of us wish it ? We live, and are denied, and suffer. And when at last even the power of suffering is dead within us, what are we ? What are we then, when all human and lovable qualities have been so crushed within us, because there is no one near to feel our love, to care for it, much less to try by tender human wiles to cherish it ? What are we then ?

Some of us who so suffer are simply what our friends make of us. We accept a frigid acquaintanceship—accept it with many smiles and much amiability—and go on living a life that is a very death. Others resent the entire state of things, and grow bitter, and meet with only bitterness in return. In how many such might one find a whole world of genuine and generous sweetness, only wanting the one daring touch of that daring thing—a pure human love ?

Again there are some, perhaps but a few, who are so ready, so bright, so light, so unconscious, or *apparently* unconscious of self, that pity or compassion seems the last thing they can need. They think of others so perpetually that no one thinks of them.

If we do think of them at all, we think how happy they are, how well-to-do, how free from care, and we give a little sigh of envy ; and while we give that careless sigh the soul we breathe it upon may be sobbing out the last convulsion of a very passion of loneliness, of unfriendedness.

They wandered back over the moor—the Canon and his niece ;



and almost inevitably the latter was sadder than she had been when she set out. And it seemed as if her uncle's somewhat unusual brightness made her sadder still. Almost it pained her—this new enjoyment of an apparently newly-recovered strength. It was as if some new life had been given him—new mental and emotional life rather than merely physical; and yet there was some element present not entirely satisfactory. Almost it was fear that Miss Theyn felt—unknown, not understood fear.

‘My bosom’s lord sits lightly on its throne.’

These words came to her mind all undesired; and even out of her own limited experience she could recall instances wherein this lighter sway of reason had but been the forerunner of tragic event. She was not superstitious, she was in the habit of laughing at presentiments; yet this evening, walking homeward over the moor, she felt herself to be more tenderly drawn to this her second and true father than ever before. She watched his lightest action, hung upon his briefest word, felt his smallest request as a binding plea. And Hugh Godfrey, if unaware, was not irresponsible.

There was a small fir copse to be passed through between the moorland and the Rectory. The wind was singing gently in the tops of the pine-trees, sighing and singing with a kind of low-toned organ note. Between the boles of the trees could be seen the far-off silver light upon the sea; a light that seemed not of heaven or of earth, but inherent in that wide world of water. Here and there a star was shining in the deep blue ether—shining silently, so far as human discerning could know.

All was silent save for the sighing of the breeze. Not a bird-note broke upon the ear; if the wavelets plashing down upon the beach made any sound, it was the sound of a murmur so subdued as to make the stillness more noticeable. It was the time, the place, to cause an aching heart to ache with a more piercing loneliness. Whatever trouble the soul might have, there was an atmosphere in which such trouble must seem to grow, to deepen, to weigh with a heavier pressure than before. Why is it so? Why does the extreme of beauty everywhere touch upon the extreme of pain?

Canon Godfrey was resting, leaning his arm upon the low stone wall that bounded the fir copse at the western side. The gate was close at hand—the gate that led into Yarburch Lane and down to the Rectory garden.

‘Wait awhile, dear,’ he said, when he first stayed his steps by the old lichen-covered gate. ‘Let us rest a minute or two.’

‘You are tired, Uncle Hugh!’

‘I think I am; tired all at once. . . . It was so glorious out on the moor; it is so glorious here!’

Miss Theyn saw how it was. The beauty—the unusual beauty—together with the exhilaration of the moorland air, had been together too strongly stimulating for the man whose strength had gone so utterly before.



'It is glorious. Still I think you will see the glory of it all from the Rectory. Will you not come now, Uncle Hugh? It is growing late!'

'Late! Yes, it is very late, and I am very glad. The evening has been so long.'

Not knowing why, Miss Theyn felt that her heart was beginning to beat somewhat rapidly, wildly. There was nothing to cause her apprehension, yet she knew herself to be growing apprehensive.

The Canon did not move. He was still leaning upon the old wall close to the gate.

'Hasn't it been a long evening—very long?' he said presently, speaking in a strange, dreamy way, quite new to him. And though no words could have been less alarming, the sense of alarm grew in Miss Theyn, heart and soul.

She turned so that she could look into the Canon's face. A crimson flush was deepening there, where for weeks, nay, months past, only the pallid hue of illness had been; the kind blue eyes were burning with a strange intense brilliancy.

Suddenly the Canon held out his hand, looking into his niece's face with a pleading, pathetic look. He spoke with extreme difficulty.

'Take my hand, Thorda! Take it in yours! It pricks! It stings! Can't you feel that it stings? Don't you feel it too?'

Miss Theyn was trying to hold the outstretched hand in hers, doing her utmost to overcome the terror that held her in no unconscious grasp. She had seen too much of late to be altogether unaware of the dread significance of the blow she had now to meet.

Yet that first moment was overwhelming. She knew how helpless she was up there on the lonely moor, with no habitation nearer than the Rectory. In her distress she turned to see if any human help might by chance be approaching; and it seemed no strange coincidence that a dark figure should be coming somewhat rapidly over the stony pathway. Looking into the Canon's face again, she met no answering look. The eyes were still unnaturally bright, but all meaning was dying rapidly out of them, and the tired head was drooping helplessly to one side; the right arm still rested on the stone wall.

'Keep up a little longer, Uncle Hugh, just a little. Someone is coming—a gentleman,' Thorda urged tremblingly.

She knew that the gentleman must hear her, he was so close now, and he was coming toward the gate.

But Hugh Godfrey did not hear her. His head was sinking lower and lower. In a very passion of terror, Thorhilda put one arm round him and stretched out the other toward the stranger. What did it matter that he was not a stranger? that her hand was laid compellingly upon the arm of Damian Aldenmede? What could such things matter in that dread moment?



There was no word of recognition ; nor was any needed. Damian understood all in that first glance. He returned the pressure of Miss Theyn's hand, not looking into her face at all, but only into the face of the unseeing friend before him.

'Do your best to support Mr. Godfrey for a few minutes,' he begged. 'I will have help here immediately.'

## CHAPTER LXVI.

### AS A TALE THAT IS TOLD.

'One cannot judge  
Of what has been the ill or well of life  
The day that one is dying—sorrows change  
Into not altogether sorrow-like.  
I do not see sadness ; but scarce misery,  
Now it is over, and no danger more.'

THE night following that evening upon the moorland hills was a strange but not unbeautiful time at Yarburgh Rectory. All night three persons had kept watch in a quiet room. The dying man's wife had borne the ordeal well ; and his niece had endured not less worthily, considering the extreme of her suffering. Each of these women knew that they had been strengthened by the presence of a man whose experience of suffering had been long and varied.

When the morning came it seemed to Miss Theyn that Damian Aldenmede had been by her side for weeks or months. Every look of his was understood, every gesture.

In the brain of each there was a kind of dumb surprise that the anticipations of months should all have been overruled by the event of one single moment.

The meeting (inevitably each of them had felt assured that they must meet some day) had been rehearsed on either side, with details and circumstances now hopeful, and now most unhopeful, according to the mood of the dreamer. Not one event had come to pass in accordance with any dream.

It was a careless word in a careless letter that had brought Damian Aldenmede to England. He had expected to find Miss Theyn in the home of her friend Mrs. Thurstone, and had arrived there on the very day on which the telegram had been received stating that the Canon was less well than usual. He had followed Miss Theyn as far as Danesborough, and there he had stayed making earnest inquiries day by day. So it was that he had appeared at a moment when he was most needed, least expected.

'Certainly Fate is kind to one sometimes,' he said to Miss Theyn, as they stood together by the fire in the Canon's room, at midnight.

'Fate?' she said inquiringly, lifting a calm white face to his grave countenance, bent down a little to hers.

'You know how I meant the word. We do not need to discuss



that, you and I. No day of my life is lived but I am impressed the more with belief in a personal Providence—the Providence of a God who has given me that day, and will require an account of it.’

Miss Theyn was silent for awhile, and a little sad.

‘Is not the thought almost *too* impressive for everyday use for every one of us?’ she said at last. ‘We can bear it just now, because we stand in the presence of one who has never lost the thought, and is going to his rest now willingly, gladly, because he has not. I speak of common days, of more ordinary hours. Is not the thought too heavy?’

‘Not, surely, if we take it rightly. To be impressed is not *necessarily* to be depressed. Nay, for me the darkest hours and the lightest, the brightest, may mingle their diverse elements with no incongruity. Is not this such an hour for both of us? Will you not let it be such?’

Damian Aldenmede paused then, watching the face of the woman he loved, seeing its expression change in the firelight from deepest calm to almost painful confusion. The change distressed him.

‘You have suffered enough,’ he said, taking Thorhilda’s hand in his, and holding it tenderly. ‘And I can well understand that this hour is one that must have yet more of suffering in it. Yet the joy, the extreme of happiness, may be all the deeper, the keener, for this sublimation of pain. May it not be so? We are here, by the side of one who has lived, and loved, and suffered, and whom we both love; and he is going from us—going into that silent land whither we must one day follow him. Will you not let him have the happiness of knowing of our happiness before he leaves us? Indeed, I have fancied he was waiting for the knowledge, hoping for it! You will let me speak of it to him?’

Thorhilda was pale and tremulous, yet she looked up as if she would search the face that was watching hers.

‘You can ask this—you can wish it—knowing all?’

He would not affect to misunderstand her.

‘Yes, knowing all; and partly because of my knowledge,’ he replied. ‘And not forgetting that I myself was to blame for much of your suffering. Is it vanity to think that if I had told you, or given you to understand at the very first that my love was yours—yours from the first hour I met you—is it vanity to think that all would have been different? Do not answer me if an answer would be pain. I have other things to confess; and it may be that my confession will be in some sense an extenuation. If I had not suffered, if the remembrance of my suffering had not been strong upon me, I had not refrained from trying to win your affection. And that another should be trying to win it was a possibility I could not face. The news came upon me like a shock—a far more terrible shock, let me say it, than I received on hearing that you had at last thought and acted for your better self. Forgive me if I speak too plainly—it is better. Let all be fair between



us, all quite open. There is much in my past that is painful—nothing that I cannot tell you. And as for you, there is nothing that you need say—not a word. I know it all.'

Again there was effort on Miss Theyn's part.

'Yes, you must know,' she said presently. 'And I am glad that it is so. I have not strength just now to lay bare all my past weakness, my past ignorance, as I should wish to do. Such strength only comes by moments at a time.'

'Then wait for the time, dear!'

'Yes, I must. I must some day tell you how, when I began to feel your affection, I yet would not let myself yield to the spell of it, and all because I dreaded poverty—simply that—the dread of the effort, and self-denial of poor living.'

'And now you dread that no longer?'

The question was asked in all sincerity. Damian Aldenmede had ascertained how much of the actual state of his circumstances had been communicated to Miss Theyn by Mrs. Thurstone, how much by Lady Diana Haddingley. Each of these ladies had said nearly all she knew; neither had known the truth.

So it was that when Thorhilda Theyn gave her word of promise to the artist who had won her love, she knew but little more than that he was a man of good birth, but of somewhat fallen fortune. Later she knew his whole life-story, not as told by Lady Di Haddingley or another. He told her all himself. But that night she was content to know nothing save that her life's one love was returned, and that nothing now stood in the way of her future happiness. Her future happiness! It was a happiness that dominated even the present hour of pain. A little later, as she stood by Canon Godfrey's bed-side, Damian Aldenmede at her right hand, the Canon saw how it was with them, and the smile on his wan, white face expressed all his satisfaction.

'I have wished for this: I have wished to know,' he said, speaking with effort. 'Dear Thorda, this atones for all—for all my weakness, my cowardice!'

'Hush, Uncle Hugh! The weakness was mine, only mine! It was you who saved me. But for you I had exchanged my soul, my very soul, for a mess of pottage—the pottage of an easy competence.'

'And how many lives are wrecked on that same rock!' the Canon replied.

He was lying back on the white pillows that propped him to a half-sitting posture. The thin, golden-brown hair streaked with white curled upon his wet forehead. The blue eyes shone brightly, intensely, as with deepest fervour of living, with keenest fervour of suffering.

'Ah, yes, how many lives are wrecked there! It is a rock the poor, the very poor, are saved from as certainly as the rich. They, God help them, are content to live from day to day, happy so that they do not suffer actual starvation. It is the class, or rather the



classes, next above that suffer really. They cannot beg, they can seldom borrow, they can do little but suffer in silence. So it is that they are tempted. . . . If you can, Thorda dear, help those—those who do not complain, who do not ask, who do not come before societies—yes, always help such as put a brave face on their poverty.'

'There I can give you some little comfort, Uncle Hugh. I think I may say that I have learned to look below the surface. So you see that your life has not been lived in vain, so far as I am concerned. There are others, many others, who will say the same. . . . Will any say it so truly, so sadly as I do?'

'Sadly, Thorda dear?'

'Yet, very sadly, for much of the light you gave me I refused to follow—yes, I refused till the very last. That was my sin. It has had its punishment, as all wilful sin must have—sin committed against light, in the midst of light.'

'But that is over now, dear.'

'No, it is not, Uncle Hugh. It never can be. I would not wish that it should. All my life must be sadder, the less bright and beautiful for the shadow of that remembered sin. I believe it to be a sin forgiven, but I would not even wish it forgotten. It will keep me low, when temptation to spiritual pride would lift me higher than it would be safe for me to go. . . . No, I can never forget; I would not if I could. . . . But now for a while let us forget ourselves—our present selves. . . . I have been thinking of Hartas. Would you not wish to see him, Uncle Hugh? . . . I know he will be wishing intensely to see you.'

The Canon smiled and clasped his niece's hand; then he drew from underneath his pillow an envelope addressed to his nephew, Hartas Theyn. It enclosed a letter written with much difficulty, and during keen bodily anguish. The Canon passed it to Damian Aldenmede.

'Will you take this to Hartas?' he said. 'Will you take *now*? It is a request that he will come and see me, and that if it seem good to him and to Barbara Burdas they will come together. You can understand.'

## CHAPTER LXVII.

### AT DAWN OF DAY.

'Weep not; O friends, we should not weep;  
Our friend of friends lies full of rest,  
No sorrow rankles in his breast.'

THE sun had risen above the eastern sea with a soft, gray, gentle, radiance, lighting all the far faint waters with a silvery glow that seemed tenderer and more poetic by far than the more dazzling and aggressive tints of rose and daffodil that often mark the rising of the sun above the northern ocean.



There is far less variation than might be deemed in this same cloud scenery. For that one whole summer a certain purple bar of cloud edged with amber rested athwart the eastern horizon from sunset to almost sunrise. Evening after evening the orb went down into the sea to the north-west, glowing under that heavy slanting bar, and morning by morning, but some two or three hours later, the sun uprose under the shadow of the same cloud, which had moved slowly to the north-east, and now was edged with rose-pink, now with golden-yellow, now with palest silvery gray. It was of this faint silver tone that morning when Canon Godfrey asked that his narrow iron bedstead might be wheeled to the side of the open window. And even as he lay there with clasped hands, uplifted eyes, and fervid, prayerful lips, his name was being urged pleadingly by another.

'Come with me, Barbara,' Hartas Theyn was saying. He had come over from the Grange before daylight, holding in his hand the letter that Damian Aldenmede had brought to him.

'Come with me,' Hartas repeated. 'Look at this letter; it is my Uncle Hugh's. He knows all. He speaks of his faith in you; he alludes to his hope for me. . . . But even now, be yourself, Barbara. Don't let your regard for him lead you to be untrue to yourself.'

Barbara listened, white, pallid, yet strong in her own pure consciousness of purest intention.

Since that terrible time when she had been rescued from suffering, if not from death, partly by the effort of Hartas Theyn, she had been more than ever sure of her feeling toward him. But in her inmost heart she admitted that not that night, nor another, had been needed for the conquest of her affection.

'It is no use—no use at all attempting to conceal it from myself. I love him—I have loved him always, and all the more because there was no one else to love him truly, to see the good in him—the good that only needed trial and trouble to bring it out. . . . Now all the world—that is, the little world about us—sees how good he is, how brave, how strong!'

All these thoughts, and many others, passed through the heart and brain of Barbara as she stood there by the little gate at the top of the steps in the growing dawn-light.

'I will be ready in a minute or two,' she said presently. 'I must ask old Hagar to come in and look after Ildy and Jack. Then I will go with you. . . . Be patient for a little while!'

She smiled, rather sadly, as she spoke; the need for patience was evidently so strong in Hartas Theyn. To this day the need is his. If he waits while his wife addresses a letter he walks up and down the room, chafing as a man might chafe who awaited a warrant ordering all his future fate. You might imagine that every line contained a decretal, 'To be or not to be,' affecting the continuance of his future life.

The sun was yet only fairly risen above the top of the eastern



cliffs when Barbara and Hartas Theyn entered the Rectory gates. Bab had put on her mourning dress, a plain black gown and a simple black bonnet, almost innocent of trimming, and lamentably far from the fashion of the hour. But of this she was not aware; nor was anyone who saw her aware. Canon Godfrey, looking upon her as she entered his room, as she came and stood by the bed where he lay dying, held out his hand with the warmth, the respect he had shown to the noblest woman of his acquaintance. If the question had been asked of him, he would in all probability have said, 'I know no greater, nobler woman than Barbara Burdas.'

She quite understood why it was that the Canon had wished to see her in these, the last moments of his life. From the beginning she had understood his wish; been glad, proud of his appreciation. In the darkest hours of her life the belief that he believed in her had been as a strong spiritual stimulant.

The sun was shining across the room by this time, throwing a halo of light all about the pillow of the dying man. The shadow of the trees but just outside flickered and danced upon the wall; upon the ivory-white hangings that were all about the bed; and the light was of that fresh inspiring kind that marks certainly the beginning of the day. No true nature-lover can ever be deceived as to the difference between the vivid brightness of the rising sun, and the subdued keenness of the sun that is setting. There is not even similitude.

'I knew you would come,' the Canon said, lifting his still blue and kindly eyes to Barbara's face. There was a smile on his lip, the old warm, winning smile; but Barbara had much ado to prevent responsive tears. 'I knew you would come—you and Hartas. It seemed so necessary that I should see you again; that I should know before I go how it is to be with you. Hartas! Barbara! . . . Is the word said—the one word that is to decide all? . . . If it is not, can you tell me why? Is there anything I can say to make that word easier to either of you?'

It was a strange hour. It seemed as if it were only yesterday that he had astonished his wife by saying, 'I am not sure that I should consider Hartas's marriage to Barbara Burdas such a great calamity!'

And how much had happened since then! And mostly the events had justified his saying. The change in Barbara herself was not greater than the change in the Squire's son, and everywhere people were attributing these changes to their rightful source. Yes, it was a strange hour, and never to be forgotten.

It was Barbara who replied to the Canon's question. At that moment she was the stronger of the two, and seeing Hartas's white face by the foot of the bed, his dark eyes lifted pleadingly to hers, his mute white lips almost tremulous, she smiled, and spoke for him as for herself.

'No, the word has never been said—the word that you ask



about. How should it have been said? For from the time that it was possible, that is to say, the time when your nephew helped to save me and mine from a terrible death, he has given me no chance to say it. . . . Is not that true, Mr. Theyn?

The pale face at the lower end of the bed flushed with a tremulous pain.

'If the question hasn't been put into words, I think you have known *why*,' the young man said, speaking awkwardly enough, yet not without pathos in his accent and appeal.

Barbara could only blush the more deeply, and look down in silence.

'Say it's true, Barbara!—that you've never given me the chance to speak—not a fair chance—since you must have known I couldn't *presume* after that night out in the roads.\* 'Twas for you to give way a little then—to make some opening. I've waited for it, I've waited all along, and no one can say I haven't waited patiently!'

'It's just as I thought!' the Canon said. 'It is all just as I imagined it to be. . . . But, oh, how foolish you have been! Life is very short; it is very full of pain, of suffering, of all that calls for human fortitude and endurance. Therefore it is that it seems to me that no crumb of happiness, of true happiness, should ever be permitted to fall to the ground. And you are wasting yours—both of you. Was it needful that I should die? that I should lie here in a brief waiting space, waiting for the friend "I travel to meet"? Was this to be before I could see you together, urge you not to waste one more day of possible happiness? . . . Ah, how strange it is!'

The Canon was not impatient. The truth was written on each of the two true faces beside him; and it was the very truth that he had longed to see, to know.

In the silence that followed, Hartas came round to the side of the bed where Barbara had hitherto stood alone, quite near to the Canon. In the nervous awkwardness but natural to her she had refused to sit down. Hartas held out his hand, a strong, brown hand, and he looked into her face as he offered it.

Perhaps it was better that he did not speak. Barbara saw the palpitating tremor—it was almost fear—as if he knew that that one moment must decide everything.

It was a strong and deep silence that followed. The Canon looked from the one face to the other, then he smiled, and holding out his own hand, he clasped the two hands that had already met, binding them there in his own warm, almost convulsive clasp.

'It is decided then?' he said. 'You are one? . . . I go with this knowledge?'

Hartas placed his other hand upon the one that Barbara had left in the Canon's grasp.

'You will yield *at last*?' he said, looking into the strong, suffering

\* 'Roads,' a common term for the sheltered waters off a seaport or shallow bay.



face of the girl. 'Say that you will! You shall not repent, Barbara. Every hour of all my future life shall be set to make your life in this world happy—both our lives happy in the world to be! . . . Say a word, only one; you have it in your power to make—well, I was going to say hell or heaven of the days to come. But that would be going beyond the truth; and there is no need for that. The simple truth lies deep enough between us two. . . . You yield *at last?*'

The final word had been uttered with extreme difficulty, as Barbara saw and heard, and with equal difficulty she replied to it.

'I will be your wife,' she said, almost sobbing out the words, yet controlling herself with all the strength left to her. And, as each one then felt, the betrothal was almost as a sacrament, being solemn and holy and binding. A light word, a careless smile, had jarred upon the sense of anyone assembled in that room as the passing of some evil thought had jarred upon the soul.

'It is decided, then?' the Canon said presently. 'You will make each other happy?'

'I will do my best,' Hartas replied, speaking with evident effort.

Barbara only smiled gravely. She had no more words at her command just then.

'I believe that you will—that you will do the very best it is in your power to do,' Canon Godfrey replied, turning to Hartas. 'And I do not think that words of mine are needed now to show you what that best means. . . . After all, life is very simple for the most part, and when it is complex the simplest heart and mind sees its way most clearly. . . . I have not strength to say much more; but let me impress two things upon you. The first is this: hold fast by prayer. If you are well and happy, and all is going smoothly, thank God in prayer. If you are fearful, and doubtful, and tremulous for the future, take all your doubt and fear to One who alone can understand. Take it there, and leave it there—nay, remain there yourself.

' " Safe on the steps of Jesu's throne,  
Be tranquil, and be blest.'

'What a picture that is in two brief lines for a soul worn, wearied, suffering! But it is not given to us to stay there long—at the foot of the Great White Throne. We have to come down from such mountain heights as these to face the fight in the valley below, the valley of every-day life, every-day endurance, every-day suffering and self-denial. . . . And that brings me to the second thing I have to say—the force and the power that is to be *bought* by the mere denial to one's self of things lawful in themselves.

'I have not strength left to say all I would wish to say on this head, but let me urge at least this, that you will make trial of judicious self-restraint even in common things. It may be that you have done much, it is joy to me to believe that you have, yet to all of us there remain heights not yet attempted. And when we have gained them, the last of them in sight at starting, we find that there



are yet others beyond ; so it is that the allurements of the spiritual life lead us on from the world that now is to the world that is to be. And how grateful we should be for such gradual drawing ! . . . Only let us always try to respond to the least and faintest call from the spirit-world which is but just outside ; let us never fail to be responsive.

‘ We are more than we seem ; the worst, the lowest, the weakest human soul among us is more than we deem it to be.

“ Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting,  
The soul that rises with us,—our life’s star,  
Hath had elsewhere its setting,  
And cometh from afar.  
Not in entire forgetfulness,  
And not in utter nakedness,  
But trailing clouds of glory do we come  
From God, who is our home.”

## CHAPTER LXVIII.

‘ LET US ARISE, AND GO.’

‘ Is it deep sleep, or is it rather death ?  
Rest anyhow it is, and sweet is rest.’

ONE day, not many weeks before, the Canon had asked to have a curious little fancy gratified. In the room that had been Thorhilda’s schoolroom there was an old piano which had belonged to his mother. It had not been much used of late ; it might not be in tune ; yet its notes had a lingering, old-fashioned sweetness of their own.

‘ Have it brought downstairs for me, Milicent dear,’ he had begged. ‘ I should like it to stand just outside my room, in that recess on the landing.’

As a matter of course his wish had been gratified, and now and then he had played a little wandering music on it himself ; now and then, too, his wife had played ; but more frequently he had asked his niece to play the things he loved best : simple, plaintive pieces of music they were for the most part, demanding more expression than execution. One especial favourite was a ‘ *Preghiera*,’ from the *Zampa* of Herold, a prayer that seemed more like a quiet yielding up of all that was left to offer than like beseeching or yearning. He had never ceased to weary of this.

And now, this autumn morning, he asked once more for the piano to be opened ; he made the request so simply, so naturally, that Thorhilda felt no sense of incongruity.

‘ Play it once again, dear, the prayer !’ he asked, holding out his hand, which his niece took and held in hers for a moment or two.

The sunlight was lower now, lower upon the white coverlet of the bed. The shadow of the ash-tree leaves still danced to and fro ; the room was still flooded with the light of the morning sun, and he who lay there wished to have it so.

They were all there, those whom he loved best. His wife sat



beside him, restraining her tears with all the strength of self-control she had. Hartas Theyn and Damian Aldenmede stood side by side at a little distance. Barbara Burdas was by the window. She would have left the room, but the dying man had wished her to remain, thinking in his own heart that her calm strength would help to strengthen others.

It might have seemed strange to some that anyone should wish for music in that last dread hour of life; but there was no strangeness in the request for anyone who had known Hugh Godfrey intimately. Thorhilda understood, and complied at once; and even for herself it was well that she did.

The notes came softly, gently—ah! that one might reproduce them here with all their beautiful yielding and renunciation—sad beauty it is, yet even the sadness is pure and unearthly.

There was a smile on the face of the dying man, a look of quiet and perfect happiness, as he lay and listened. When the last note had been played, he looked up for his niece's return to his bedside.

'Thank you, Thorda,' he said, speaking with not much apparent effort. 'And now I am going to sleep. . . . Let me say good-bye. . . . And let me say something else I have not had the courage to say as yet. It is this. I say it to one and all. I say it with all the strength left to me. *Do not sorrow for me when I am gone! . . . I entreat you not to sorrow.*

'You remember the words heard of him to whom the vision was vouchsafed in the Isle of Patmos—words uttered by a voice from Heaven, saying :

*"Write : Blessed are the dead that die in the Lord from henceforth : Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours."*

'That they may rest! . . . I have not talked much of my weariness, have I, Milicent dear? But I have been *very* tired. . . . Life is a very tiring thing. . . . I have an opinion—I have held it long—that human life will not always be so tiring. . . . I think people will see, will have their eyes opened to discern when their friends, their neighbours, are breaking down, dying for very tiredness. And then they will help each other. . . . They will not wait to show their sympathy by sending a beautiful wreath of white flowers to the grave-side. . . . No, they will see a little before; and help will be given; and people will rest. They will know what it is to rest in life—not in death only. . . . And there are other changes coming—greater than these. I shall see them, but not now. I shall behold them, but not nigh. . . . But I have no wish to wait to see—no, none at all. . . . I am too weary—so very weary that I am glad to go.

'Glad—yes, but not glad as those are who enter into life singing. No; I must enter sighing, if, indeed, I enter at all—sighing for things done, for things left undone.

'If there be any singing, it will be the song of those who make joy in the presence of the Angels of God over each sinner that repents

'Those who make joy in the presence of the Angels! . . . Who



are they? . . . Surely they must be of those who know of the sins, the sufferings of the human beings who repent? . . . Knowledge they must have of us who sin—yes, knowledge and sympathy—deep and keen sympathy with every soul acquainted with spiritual failure. . . . And which of us is not acquainted with such failure? . . .

‘We have dreams—nay, more than dreams, more than visions, more than ideals—we have a well-defined model of life set before us in closest detail, minutest detail. . . . And we will not see it. If we are now and then compelled to see, we refuse to follow.

‘We refuse. . . . Now that I lie here, dying, I see that I myself *have refused* to live up to the standard of life demanded of me.

\*                      \*                      \*                      \*

‘Aldenmede. . . . Thorda. . . . *Live the life I would now live if I could.*

### EPILOGUE

Two years have passed by—years of change, of joy, of sorrow to almost everyone of those whose life-story has been told or touched upon in this brief history.

As a matter of course, there is a new Rector at Yarburgh Rectory—a young, strong, energetic man, who has had his own way to fight, and has fought somewhat bravely. If some new storyteller were to tell *his* tale, and to tell it truly, it would be worth reading. But, indeed, I think he could tell it best himself. If his story should perchance be as lively as his sermons, one might consider that a new departure in autobiography had been taken.

The old way of ending a story to the music of the church bells that ring out the old solo of single life, ring in the beautiful new duet of the life to be, is not at all a way to be decried. It is commonplace, you say; so is the fact it represents.

But the art to tell the true story of the marriage that took place at Yarburgh awhile ago is not mine. People said it was a very beautiful wedding—that the two people principally concerned, that is to say, Thorhilda Theyn and Damian Aldenmede, looked, each of them, so grand, so great, that the onlookers felt as if they had never seen either of them with any true appreciation before. And it was not the dress—even Mrs. Kerne, the bride’s aunt, made haste to say that. No, it was not the dress—for even Miss Theyn’s dress, though it was white, and light, and suggestive of all maiden purity, was yet not a costly or studiously impressive costume. The *Danesborough Gazette* described it in detail; describing also the dress of the two bridesmaids, one of whom was the bride’s sister, Miss Rhoda Theyn, and the other the Honourable Sarah Thelton. Other details were added, among the rest, that Mr. and Mrs. Aldenmede had started on their wedding tour a few hours after the ceremony. They had decided upon the small and quaintly attractive hotel in the Finstermüntz Pass as a place in which to live for awhile in perfect beauty, in perfect quiet. How perfect the beauty was can hardly



be told in words. The snow was white upon the Alpine heights ; the mountain torrents rushed rapidly down the scarred rocks, among the dark pines. All day long the sun shone brilliantly into the ravine—shining with such force, such glad exhilaration as made of life a new and keen pleasure.

‘Every morning, as soon as I am fairly awake, I feel new made,’ Mrs. Aldenmede declared. ‘I believe that if I might live here I should never grow old. . . . And you, Damian, you look ten years younger than you did on the day on which I first saw you !’

‘You remember that day ?’

‘Remember it? Am I likely to forget? . . . What I would forget, if I could, is the blindness that came after.’

‘And long ago I commanded you to put all recollection of that away. . . . Dear, we cannot afford to look too much into the past. We can none of us afford that. Where is the man or woman whose past is not spoiled or marred in one way or another? All we have to do is to repent, to confess when we have erred, and then set out, brightly, strongly, on a new and better way. And there is much for us to do. Our life will not be empty of work, of thought, of much care for others. . . . I want to prepare you for that, dear ; for work rather than leisure ; for thought rather than ease. . . . I expect that there will be no grain of the knowledge, the experience you have learned while with Mrs. Thurstone but will not be of use to you now—of use to others.’

‘And are you fearing that I shall not be glad to be of use?’

‘You ask that question too lightly for me to give any formal answer. If you were truly afraid of my opinion it would be different. . . . No ; . . . I expect that I shall only have to exert my influence in the way of restraint.’

There was another pause, broken by Mrs. Aldenmede. They were sitting on one of the rustic seats near the lower part of the garden—if indeed so wild and uncultivated a spot could be called a garden at all. A light wind was whispering in the pines, catching the tops of the tall campanulas ; a perfect chorus of crickets were chirping loudly in the grass.

‘I hope you have been impressed by one thing,’ Thorda said at last. ‘I have been your wife now seven weeks, and I have not asked you seven questions concerning your future home—yours and mine.’

Damian smiled.

‘I have been greatly impressed,’ he replied ; ‘but I think I have understood. . . . It was a little penance, was it not?’

‘Not a little one. I have wanted to know so much.’

‘It is somewhat strange that you should have kept your silence unbroken until to-day.’

‘Is it? . . . Why? . . . Is to-day more than any other day?’

‘In one sense it is. . . . You saw what a packet of letters I had this morning?’

‘Yes ; and I saw that one or two absorbed you, and that you



gathered them up, and took them away, and never spoke of them to me at all.'

'And yet you ask no question! You are a dear, patient wife. . . . It consoles me to think that reward may come.'

'It *has* come; I know it; I *know* that something has happened! Tell me what!'

Damian Aldenmede rose up from his seat and walked up and down the road for awhile. The expression on his face was very grave.

'I ought not to keep you in suspense,' he said at last. 'My uncle is dead; he died suddenly nearly four days ago. The telegram that was sent has never reached us. It is too late for us to dream of going to King's Alden for the funeral. . . . I am very sorry; and I think—I fear we must go soon.'

Mrs. Aldenmede received the news in silence. Though she did not understand all, she knew much; at any rate, she knew that the two sons of Sir Ralph Aldenmede had been dead for some years. King's Alden—a place of which she had heard from others—would now belong to her husband; and the title would be his—and *hers*. But she recollected that, in all probability, no great wealth would come with the title, while assuredly great responsibility would come. This was what her husband had tried to prepare her for.

Presently she joined him as he walked up and down, placing her arm in his, and walking silently for a while.

'King's Alden is a pretty place, is it not?' she asked by-and-by.

'Pretty? No, dear, I should not call it pretty. I do not suppose it could ever be made so. . . . Still, we will do what we can, and we need not live there more than you like.'

\* \* \* \* \*

It was not much more than a month later when one evening a carriage drove in at the gates of the avenue of chestnuts that lined the way to King's Alden. It was early twilight. The tall trees almost shut out the sky. The broad white road gleamed straight all the way before them; here and there a marble vase held some rare late-flowering plant; here and there a fountain was playing in the midst of a bed of gay flowers.

There were lights in the windows all along the front of the house; a stately house it was, built by Vanbrugh, and frequently mentioned as one of the architect's master-works, though rather for its beauty of proportion than for its size or grandeur. It was built of the red granite of the neighbourhood; yet it had in the daylight a curiously cold and hard look.

Damian Aldenmede, who had seen it in his youth, had had a strong fear that the present mistress of King's Alden might be rather repelled than attracted by the first sight of it. He was glad that the gray twilight lent so much soft mystery to it, and to its surroundings—glad too that their late arrival necessitated the lighting of many lamps and candles. All seemed bright enough now. There were some dozen of the old servants of the place gathered to greet them; flowers and plants had been placed in



abundance ; and above, on every side of the four-square hall, the portraits of former possessors looked down, not all of them Aldenmedes.

The place had changed hands more than once since Sir John Vanburgh had received his final cheque from the first owner. But the place had been long enough in the hands of the ancestors of Sir Damian Aldenmede for him to be enabled to feel, if not pride, then certainly satisfaction, in taking possession of a place that he hoped to be able to look upon as a home for him and for his for generations to be. It was no low or unworthy sensation that he felt as he handed his wife from the carriage that had been sent to meet them ; escorted her up the wide gray steps into the stately old entrance-hall.

A white-headed man, grave and venerable, the steward of the late owner of King's Alden, came forward with a little speech, that seemed to die on his lips as Lady Aldenmede hastened with girlish haste from her husband's side and took the old man's hand. She could bear no more of his formal and studied words.

'I am glad, very glad to come to a home where there are some who are glad to see me,' she said, with enthusiasm in every tone and look.

Then turning to the others who stood near, she said :

'It will require time to make us known to each other ; but no time is needed for me to assure you that we shall do our best to make this house a real home for everyone who may live under its roof—a real home, a Christian home, God granting that it be so. . . . I will tell you later all I mean by that ; and my husband will tell you better than I can. He has an idea that the true home is the world's true centre. I need hardly say that I agree with him ; indeed, how much I agreed, I did not know till this present hour.'

Then, quite suddenly, the momentary enthusiasm failed, or rather the power to express it failed.

'I haven't made a speech, have I, dear ?' Lady Aldenmede asked of her husband when they were left alone in the wide yet cheery-looking room, which had been prepared for them by no unwilling hands.

Flowers were there ; they were everywhere. The dressing-table in Lady Aldenmede's room was a very miracle of loveliness, and signs of care, of thought, were visible on every hand. It was not wonderful that half an hour later, when her husband came to see if she were dressed for dinner, he found her in tears—tears not easily charmed away.

'It seems as if God Himself had rained down upon one's head the coals of fire, the vengeance of an extreme and tender lovingness. . . . You see it all, Damian, do you not ? Remember how I fell because of my dread of poverty, of a cold and naked life. Then at the last moment I was saved ; and after that it seemed as if all else must be penitence, as if only an extreme of privation could reconcile me to myself. And though I had a sort of fear in marrying you, a fear that my time of probation might probably be at an end, I did not dream of this, how could I ? How could I dream of anything so far beyond the brightest earthly prospect



ever opened to me, even in thought before. And now, now I feel so small, so mean, so unworthy. It is as if some one had cast a splendid gift at me with words of scorn. And yet this is no right mood, and no, I do not rightly express my true mood, not all of it. I am grateful, I am *very* grateful, and I am happy in the midst of all my regretful sorrow, I am very happy! . . . We can do so much now, can we not, Damian? There must be something to be done in a neighbourhood like this!

'*Something!* I fear that everything waits to be done. So far as I know, the entire district about King's Alden has been neglected, and this for generations. It will require our time, our money, our prayers, our patience, and the utmost of our help and strength. . . . Do not be afraid, dear, do not dread an unbroken felicity.'

'It is better so.'

'It is much better. . . . It seems like a paradox, but I am happier far in knowing that my happiness is not likely to be unshaded, that the shadow of the crosses that fall upon other lives may cast the blessing of that shadow over my own, over both our own. . . . So we need not fear.'

'No. . . . Yet is it not strange how an element of fear seems almost always to be mingled with any sudden or great felicity?'

'Yes, it is strange; but I for one would not wish it otherwise. And since it seems almost universal, there is doubtless some truth hidden underneath to be discovered at a later date. Often it seems to me that the world is yet but in its infancy. We know so little; we discern that there is so much yet to be known.'

'So it has seemed to me,' Thorda replied; 'yet I fancy that each one of us by our human life (if truly lived) may advance the science of human living somewhat.'

'Ah! there you touch upon an immense truth. Our life if truly lived! We can none of us grasp all that that means in a single moment. Only the surface ideas occur to us. We know that we should be patient, be temperate, self-denying; that we should have compassion for the sorrows of others, nay, that we should seek out such sorrows, set ourselves to avert sorrows that are only on the way to others; but there is much beyond that we do not recognise. Which of us has a truly tender dread of the ills that mar the inner life of the people about us? Nay, do we not start aside and leave suspected suffering to cure itself, or develop itself, as may be in the nature of it? Dreading the evil of interference, we strike upon the rock of neglectful indifference.'

'And how shall any human being perceive the right medium?'

'Only by being lovingly human. The true lover of humanity can hardly make grievous mistakes. If he should, his very lovingness would cause his mistakes to be forgiven.'

'Charity beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. . . . Charity never faileth.'

\* \* \* \* \*

In the spring of the year that followed, Sir Damian and Lady



Aldenmede went once again to Ulvstan Bight. Mrs. Godfrey went with them—indeed, she went with them everywhere, as a cherished and valued companion, one who helped to make their home life richer and fuller, and graced it with much knowledge and experience.

The meeting between those who came from King's Alden and those who came from Garlaff Grange was as interesting as it was affectionate. Mr. and Mrs. Hartas Theyn were foremost in the group of people who entered the drawing-room at the new Alexandra Hotel. The Squire and Rhoda had purposely lingered a little behind, but it was easy to see that no ill-feeling had inspired them. The dinner passed off lightly and pleasantly, all undue warmth of emotion being decorously kept in the background for that evening.

It was next morning on the cliff-top that Sir Damian Aldenmede, meeting Mrs. Hartas Theyn, was enabled to say a fitting word—a word that seemed to close a certain chapter of the family history. And Barbara replied with a dignity, a gentleness, a winningness all her own.

'I always look upon that day when I met you on the scaur as the beginning of my life's happiness,' she said. 'The beginning of all true search after truth; of all that has been good and helpful to me. Before you had spoken to me of anything but the common speech of the day I had wished to do something for you—to rise in some way a little nearer to your level. You awoke something in me that had slept before, but could never sleep again. And then you showed all your true generosity and helped me in every way; and then she, Thorhilda, began to help me too; and *how* I loved you both, and felt as if my love were all one! It is so natural now, to be able to think of you together. Indeed, I think I have never thought of you apart. . . . And oh! I am happy, very happy! To think of my being even related to you—to the very people I love so much! Yes, I never thought to be so happy!'

'And it is an all-round sort of happiness?' Damian Aldenmede asked. Barbara looked up quickly.

'You are meaning with regard to my husband? He has only one fault—an undue humility. I shall never cure him of it. But I am not sure that I wish to do so. . . . If he has another fault, it is an undue generosity. The money he gives away, the people he asks to come and stay with us, would be beyond belief if I were to tell you of it all in detail. But, somehow, we do not really seem the poorer for it. . . . And if we were, I believe that we should still be happy—even very happy; he is so gentle, and so thoughtful, and so careful of me and mine. You know that he has sent Jack to a good school at Danesborough; and if he were little Ilda's own father he could not love her more. And the child's love for him is most touching! If I had any jealousy in me it would certainly be awakened when I see her rushing to the door with her little arms outspread to meet him, and his outstretched to clasp her! . . . Ah! yes; I am a very happy woman!'



Damian Aldenmede went away from the top of the cliff in a mood not easy to describe—the elements being so very various. Gratitude stirred in him, and wonder, and reverence ; and last, but not least, repentance for the want of faith and hope that had darkened so many of his days, and darkened them so unreasonably.

‘Why do we not *trust* more?’ he asked of himself. ‘Surely the want of trust means defect in one’s self ! To live nobly, rightly, humanly, would be to store up a reserve for the days to be—even though the days should be few and evil.

“Few and evil” we deem them, these days of ours—but that is when they are overpast.’

‘In the beginning all is lightness and brightness—and all we have, all we desire, is flooded in the light of hope. Then disappointment follows, with perhaps despair ; and the utmost we can do is to hold on for awhile, as people cling to a wreck in the darkness and the storm.

‘And after the storm comes calm, with daybreak, and the sun shining over the tops of the dark mountains of grief that had surrounded us on every side. So we come to understand the ordering of this human life of ours, that it is but as a travelling from the cradle to the grave—leading us, now by fair valleys, clothed with the olive and the vine, now by barren Alpine heights, where only snow and hail and mist lend variation to the scene. Again we descend, perhaps to the dreary shore of some dead sea of life, where we may wander on unhopefully, nay, even unwishfully. We would lie down and die if we could do so sinlessly ; and we wonder that sin should be in the wish.

‘But by-and-by the sun rises once more—the sun of faith, of hope, of belief in all that makes life worth the living. Then it is that we rise to full consciousness of all that lies in the tender, yearning, loving saying :

“*Ye will not come unto Me, that ye might have life.*”

‘Then it is that at last we awaken to full perception of that great, grand truth, there is no life but that—the life hid in Christ Jesus.

“*I am the Life, the Truth, the Way !*”

‘There is no other life, no other truth, no other way. All else is pain and darkness, and ignorance, and death.

‘There is no other way but the way of the cross, the way of daily, hourly self-denial, of perpetual watchfulness ; the way of unceasing prayer.

“*Pray without ceasing.*”

‘That is life’s last secret.

‘The man or woman who is acquainted with that secret will be in no danger of exchanging his or her soul for any mess of pottage to be offered by this world of ours—this seductive, tempting, disappointing world.’















LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



00021899112

